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CHOICE

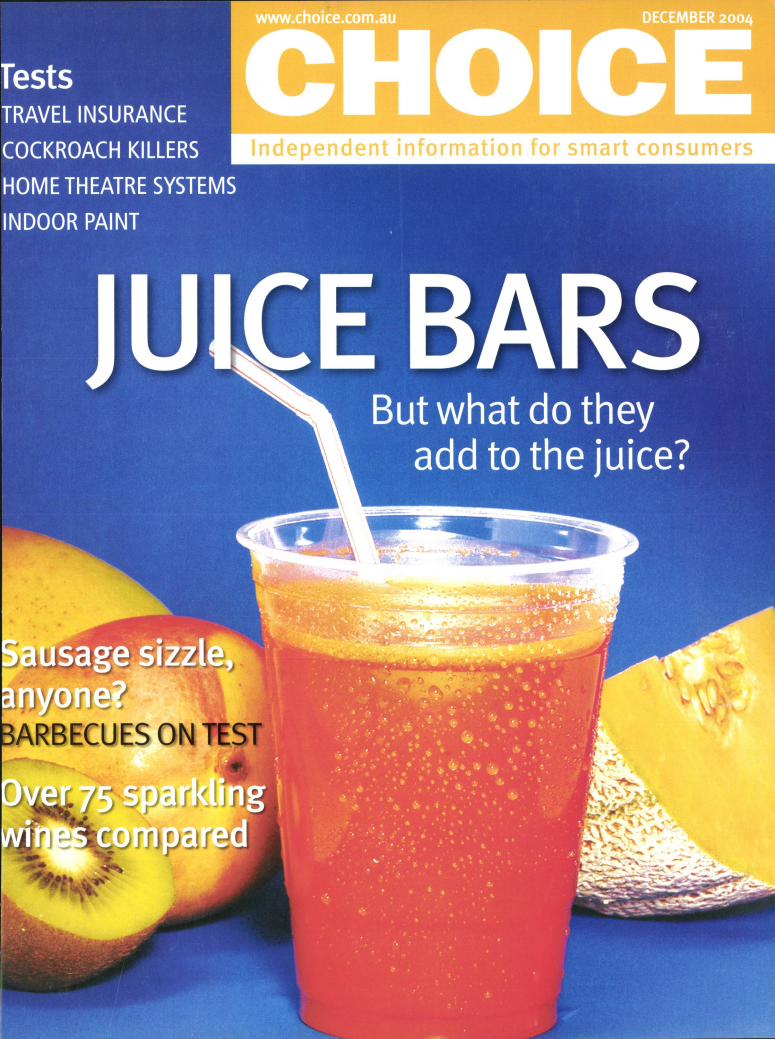
Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

TRAVEL INSURANCE
COCKROACH KILLERS
HOME THEATRE SYSTEMS
INDOOR PAINT

JUICE BARS

But what do they add to the juice?



Sausage sizzle, anyone?
BARBECUES ON TEST

Over 75 sparkling wines compared

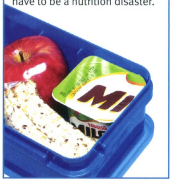
COMING SOON ...

GSM phones

More new mobile phones tested.

Lunchbox snacks

A snack for your kids doesn't have to be a nutrition disaster.



Cots

Five out of 10 cots tested failed some safety tests.

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On the herbal bandwagon ...

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

Everyone says juice bars are a great idea, and in their basic concept they are. Finally you can get a before-your-eyes-fresh juice or smoothie as a quick snack instead of some fat-and-sugar-filled piece of junk food from the usual kind of fast-food shop. You don't even have to run the fried-food-smell gauntlet while you order and drink it.

So what's prompting many juice bar chains to compromise their healthy image by offering what are essentially additives to their juices? Fine, some are just vitamins or minerals to help you get what you're supposed to each day, but others are supplements of medicinal herbs with words like 'Skinny', 'Trim', 'Slimmers', 'Protector' or 'Stress Relief' attached to their names.

Got the message? Starting to think these supplements could give us a push in the direction suggested by their names? In fact they're just the old get-slim or get-healthy magic bullet myth back in full regalia but a new format.

Because it *is* a try-on, of course. As far as CHOICE's research could discover (see page 8), even if there were any evidence the herbal supplements could do what's implied (which there isn't for many of them), it's unlikely that enough of them is added to have any effect, or that they're in the right formulation to be any use.

So returning to my original question: why are the juice bars messing around with perfectly healthy products by adding these herbal supplements? We don't know how much difference they make to the companies' bottom line (at least a little, to be sure), but one answer is likely to be fashion: advertising and providing a probably useless ingredient to cash in on the popularity of New Age 'herbal' alternatives. Disappointing, and patronising to their customers; stick to the juices.

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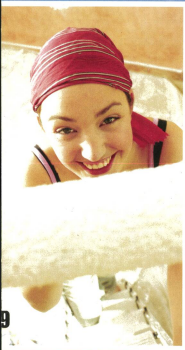

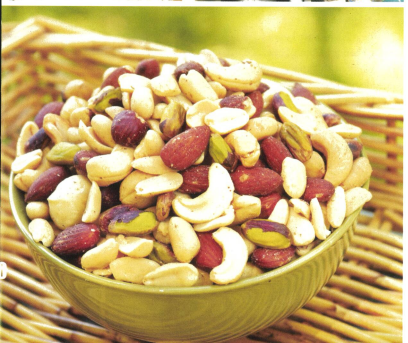

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Photo: Ute Wegmann

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Your next issue will be January/February 2005, which will arrive in late January or early February.

Dud ads for air conditioners

Finding the right air conditioner model for your needs can be daunting enough without being faced with misleading or confusing advertising.

FALSE GREEN CLAIMS

In October 2004, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) cracked down on Daikin Australia for misleading advertising of air conditioners using the hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants HFC-407C and HFC-134a.

The company had claimed in sales brochures and on its website that models using these refrigerants were environmentally friendly, and that their use wouldn't contribute to global warming.

The ACCC considered these claims misleading, because the refrigerants in question are potent greenhouse gases that don't benefit the environment and will contribute to global warming.

Daikin won't continue to make these claims, and will place corrective advertising on its website.

The ACCC said this case should "sound a warning to businesses attempting to promote their products or services using misleading environmental claims".

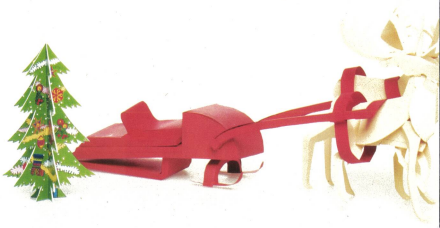
HORSEPOWER vs KILOWATTS

Using horsepower (hp) to describe the capacity or efficiency of an air conditioner is "misleading and can result in people choosing the wrong equipment", according to the Air-conditioning and Refrigeration Equipment Manufacturers Association (AREMA).

Horsepower is an imperial unit used to measure engine power. With an air conditioner, it only describes the power of its electric motor, saying nothing about its efficiency or cooling or heating capacity. Consequently, the conversion from hp into kW that's often used (1 hp = 0.75 kW) is meaningless as far as the air conditioner's cooling capacity is concerned.

An efficient air conditioner may have twice the cooling capacity of a less efficient one with the same-size motor. "It's easy for manufacturers and retailers to sell consumers a poorly performing air conditioner if they just quote the hp of the engine," says AREMA.

CHOICE wants to see manufacturers and retailers stop the confusing use of horsepower in air conditioner advertising, and instead focus on the capacity information in kW provided on the energy rating label.



Christmas with your computer

Now that computers are such a common feature in Australian households, our sister publication, *Computer* CHOICE, has compiled a list of websites and online tools that'll help you get ready for Christmas. There are links to sites with paper decorations, screensavers for your computer, e-cards and Christmas recipes.

Decorations: For those on a budget — or wanting to keep small fingers busy in the weeks before Christmas — try making your own paper ornaments. These generally come as PDF files, which can be viewed using special software called a PDF viewer. You can download a free PDF viewer from www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html.

Paper models range from simple, single-fold ornaments such as a Christmas tree, to multi-step, complex designs like a reindeer and sleigh (see above). Print the designs onto heavy paper of at least 100 gsm (not photo paper), available from art supply stores, craft shops and some newsagents and stationers, cut them out and start folding.

- Christmas tree: http://papertoys.com/christmas-tree.htm
- Reindeer: www.yamaha-motor.co.jp/global/entertainment/papercraft/seasons/10/index.html
- Other designs: www.papertoys.com, www.freepapertoys.com and www.peterjvisser.demon.nl/indexe.html

Screensavers and e-cards: Christmas screensavers can be as simple as a row of lights at the top of your screen or all-singing, all-dancing affairs, like the interactive Christmas tree designed by Delfyn Software.

Some cost a small amount (about $US10) or you may like a free limited trial:

- www.dreamscenes.net/christrescre.html
- www.pixelparadox.com
- www.twinklebulbs.com

If you're after free electronic Christmas cards, BlueMountain Arts is one of the longest running e-card sites. Its large range includes humorous, traditional and animated cards. Care2 is another site that stocks free Christmas e-cards:

- www.bluemountain.com
- www.care2.com/send/catxmas1.html

Recipes: It's all too easy to find US or UK-based traditional Christmas recipes designed for cold weather and comfort. Finding dishes that are more suited to an Australian summer celebration is a bit more challenging. Here are a few sites that have a good range of recipes, but you may need to sort for Christmas recipes, Australian dishes or summer menus:

- www.everythingaustralian.info/christmas/kitchen
- http://fitdv.recipezaar.com
- www.epicurious.com
- www.allrecipes.com
- http://recipes.alastra.com

Subscribe to *Computer* CHOICE for more information on the internet and computers. Call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

UPDATE

PEDOMETERS

CHOICE, October 2004

Thinking of buying someone a pedometer for Christmas? Hoping to stave off the effects of holiday season indulgence?

10,000 Steps (an extension of the 10,000 Steps Rockhampton project) was recently rolled out nationwide. By registering with the program you get a free online step log to fill in (which displays daily step data and calculates info such as your total steps, average steps, busiest month, busiest day, etc), an e-newsletter, activity tips, members' stories and other useful services.

The program also markets packages containing a **YAMAX SW-700** pedometer — which was one of our recommended models — and a physical activity logbook. You can find your nearest stockist of the package through the website, or order it from 10,000 Steps direct.

Find out more at the official website: www.10000steps.org.au. If you simply want to order the pedometer and logbook package, phone 1800 000 180.

CLOTHES DRYERS

CHOICE, May 2004

- In the table on page 46, based on information from the manufacturer we said the **WESTINGHOUSE LD503A, LD352A,** and **LD353A** had the following features: reverse tumbling, a drying rack, and a cold/no heat setting. The manufacturer now tells us these machines don't have any of these features, but you can get a short cool setting by selecting the cool down/airing phase at the end of the cycle; the drying rack is available as an optional extra.
- The **HOOVER 5050EDD** was listed as not having a cold/no heat cycle but the manufacturer has now told us it does. It's also stackable, with an optional stacking kit.

Dodgy drills and other unsafe power tools

As home renovation season goes into full swing over the summer break, don't get caught out with a dangerous and dodgy power tool.

The NSW Office of Fair Trading this year found a number of cheap, unapproved tools — which failed multiple safety tests — on sale around the state. These included small portable drills, angle grinders, hammer drills, power saws (particularly 'wet' saws for cutting tiles) and power supplies for battery drills and battery-operated tools. As sales of similar items have been reported previously in other states, this is clearly not a problem that's gone away.

What can you do to protect yourself? First, buy from a reputable retailer or dealer, and treat with caution tools on sale at local markets, car boot sales, building sites, rural field days, farm trade shows and liquidation auctions. Avoid:

- Power tools that don't have an Australian Regulatory Compliance Mark (see above) or an Australian approval number on the nameplate. These numbers start with a letter designating the state, followed by a number. For example, N12345 means the tool has been approved by the NSW Office of Fair Trading, while V12345 shows approval by the Victorian Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector, and so on.
- Tools with a rewirable plug instead of the normal Australian moulded plug.
- Tools that look like a well-known brand but are in fact slightly different.
- Tools with no warranty card or instructions.
- And be cautious of tools that aren't rated for the current Australian voltage of 230 V — for example, those rated at 220 V.

If you see any tools on sale you suspect may be dodgy, report them to your local office of fair trading or its equivalent.

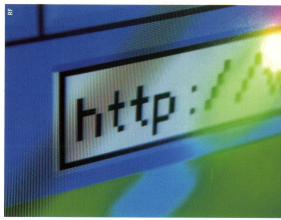
TAMARA GRAHAM

Older but wiser

Anti-aging quackery and hucksterism are part of a multimillion-dollar global industry, taking advantage of gullible and vulnerable people. And most internet sites that sell anti-aging treatments are a con. Those are the conclusions of a US study, reported in the November issue of CHOICE *Health Reader*.

Researchers from Boston Medical Centre and Boston University's School of Medicine surveyed the internet for websites marketing human growth hormone and other anti-aging products, as well as those providing consumer advice about aging, and published their findings in the *Journal of Gerontology*. While there are laws that prohibit false claims being made, ultimately it's left to consumers to spot a con and not be duped into buying. The researchers offer some insights into what to be wary of, including:

- A sales pitch that offers no medical or scientific evidence to back up the claims.



- Claims that the medical establishment is trying to suppress the product.
- The use of testimonials and personal anecdotes.
- Attempts to convey credibility by showing pictures of people in lab coats looking into microscopes, or other academic medical themes.

If you'd like to subscribe to CHOICE *Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free, or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

The law sides with vulnerable consumers

Have you ever succumbed to the persistent sales spiel of a door-to-door salesperson and bought something you didn't need? If you're sound in mind and body you can probably imagine how much more vulnerable disadvantaged consumers are in these situations. But after a Federal Court ruling earlier this year, companies and their sales personnel may need to review their sales tactics.

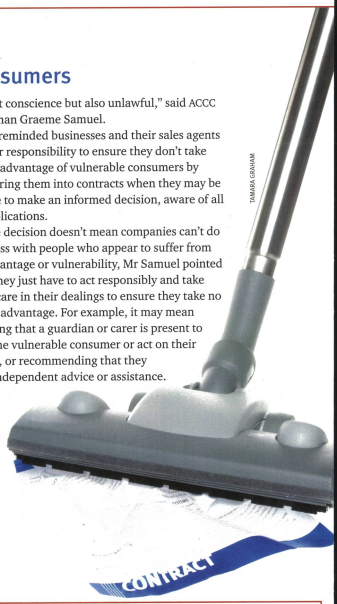
The Federal Court found that Lux Pty Ltd had engaged in unconscionable conduct in breach of the Trade Practices Act in relation to the door-to-door sale of a $949 Lux vacuum cleaner to a vulnerable consumer. The salesman hadn't given the woman the opportunity to get independent advice or assistance before having her sign the contract to buy the vacuum cleaner.

The judge concluded that it should have been apparent to the salesman that the consumer, a woman who was alone at home at the time the door-to-door salesman called, was "patently a person of some vulnerability" because she was substantially illiterate, unable to understand commercial matters in any depth and unlikely to be able to make a worthwhile judgment as to the benefit of buying the vacuum cleaner.

"This decision is very significant as it sends a clear message to businesses and their sales agents that such behaviour is not only considered to be against conscience but also unlawful," said ACCC Chairman Graeme Samuel.

He reminded businesses and their sales agents of their responsibility to ensure they don't take unfair advantage of vulnerable consumers by pressuring them into contracts when they may be unable to make an informed decision, aware of all its implications.

The decision doesn't mean companies can't do business with people who appear to suffer from disadvantage or vulnerability, Mr Samuel pointed out. They just have to act responsibly and take extra care in their dealings to ensure they take no unfair advantage. For example, it may mean ensuring that a guardian or carer is present to help the vulnerable consumer or act on their behalf, or recommending that they seek independent advice or assistance.



TAMARA GRAHAM

CORRECTION

DIGITAL CAMERAS

CHOICE, October 2004

In the table on pages 12–13 some of the overall scores were incorrectly calculated from individual component test scores (image quality, ease of use, etc). Correct calculations mean the overall scores are slightly different from those printed, resulting in minor changes of rank order of some models in the table. The originally recommended models are still good cameras, but some others not in the original *What to buy* list are in fact just as good.

The full table is too big to republish here, but if you'd like to see the new version, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Oct 04 under 'Digital cameras' in the index. If you don't have access to the internet, call our Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 and they'll mail a copy of the new table to you.

The good news is that since printing the October article we have results for 16 more cameras, which we've included in the new table, and we've deleted any discontinued models.

MERCURY IN FISH

CHOICE, September 2004

On page 4 we said tuna was on a list of fish species to avoid eating because of unsustainability as well as on a list of fish to avoid (particularly by pregnant women) because they contain too much mercury.

While the sustainability issue still stands, the mercury information is incorrect and based on old advice. Australia's food regulator, FSANZ, now gives the following advice on tuna:

"In general, it is safe for all population groups, including pregnant women, to consume two to three serves of any type of tuna per week (canned or fresh). Canned tuna generally has lower levels of mercury than other tuna because the tuna used for canning are smaller species that are generally less than one year old. FSANZ has calculated that it is safe for all population groups to consume a snack can of tuna (95 grams) every day, assuming no other fish is eaten."

yourletters

How not to phone home

After reading *Phoning home* (CHOICE, September 2004) I went to the Nobelcom.com website and, after reading all the information provided, decided to order a card over the internet, giving them my credit card details for the purchase.

I was then emailed and told to call a North American telephone number to take my order. When, reluctantly, I did so, I was told that I had to either provide the name and phone number of a US resident who could confirm my email address, or email or fax copies of both sides of my credit card and a photo ID.

Having to phone the US and wait in a queue is an onerous requirement and faxing/emailing one's credit card details and signature is obviously not secure.

I subsequently dealt over the internet with a UK-based phone card provider. *They* called *me* to check that I had ordered the card and was at the address I claimed, and the order went through shortly afterwards.

Rod Shogren
By email

CHOICE's research found the Nobelcom.com cards generally offered a good deal, and before publishing information about them, we checked that overseas customers could purchase cards. They told us some form of ID was required, but it didn't seem to be out of the ordinary. However, if Rod's encounter is any guide, the procedure seems more convoluted than it appeared to be.

We asked Nobelcom.com to comment on his experience, and it explained it was due to its "extensive fraud prevention policy for our customers' protection".

However, as Rod pointed out, asking customers to fax or email copies of their credit card with a signature exposes them to risk of fraud, and is seemingly at odds with Nobelcom.com's intention to reduce it. If you know someone in the US who can verify your order, it's much more straightforward, otherwise it's debatable whether it's worth pursuing. And it doesn't have to be so difficult, as Rod discovered with the other phone card company he used.

More on Tassie scallops

In September 2004 CHOICE published an article on *Sustainable seafood (CHOICE Cuts)*. This article was based on the 2002–2003 Fisheries Status Reports, put out by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, that was relied on in a campaign by the Australian Marine Conservation Society. But it should be noted that this report was an assessment of the fish stocks managed by the Australian Government and doesn't relate to the many fish stocks managed by individual states. The AMCS campaign and report don't highlight this and can mislead consumers into avoiding well managed, sustainable seafood.

Scallops are a good example of this. While the Commonwealth-managed Bass Strait Scallop Fishery has had very limited catches over the last few years to allow stocks to rebuild, the adjacent Tasmanian scallop fishery is very productive. Tasmanian fishery managers and the fishing industry made the hard decisions quite a few years ago and introduced strict harvesting controls to allow scallop stocks to rebuild. Stocks are now back to healthy levels and fishing operations are conducted in only limited areas each year under a strict quota system to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the fishery.

Consumers can look forward to annual supplies of high-quality Tasmanian scallops on a seasonal basis. However, I urge them to look closely at the labelling on the scallops they purchase to ensure they're not imported scallops, which may have a high water content and will certainly not have the rich flavour that has made Tassie scallops famous worldwide.

Stuart Richey
Managing Director
Richey Fishing Company
Devonport, Tasmania

THUMBS UP!

▮ **ELECTROLUX AUSTRALIA** gets a thumbs-up from John Hall. When a **WESTINGHOUSE** fridge and wall oven — both around 18 months out of warranty — developed problems, **ELECTROLUX** promptly dispatched a technician and all parts were replaced at no charge.

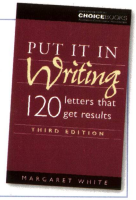
▮ Lisa Delany gives a thumbs-up to **MARTEC,** which replaced a faulty new ceiling fan that had been in storage for two years and so was out of warranty, without question or even requiring proof of purchase.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Rod Shogren, receives *Put it in writing* or any other book of his choice from *Consumer Bookshelf*, pages 47–48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.

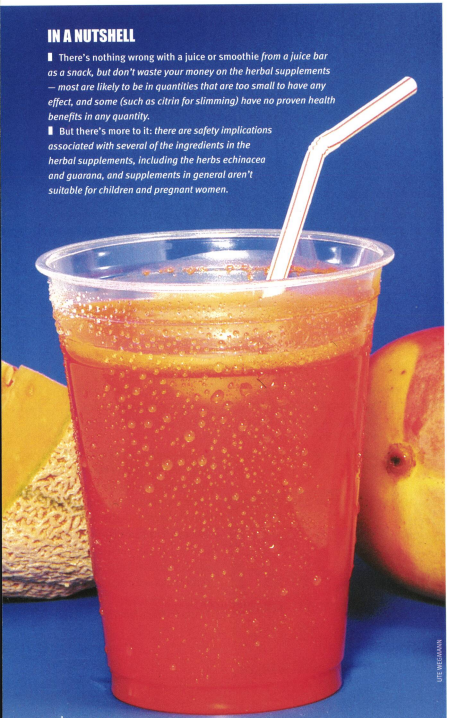


Juicy secrets

Don't be seduced by the trendy marketing — many supplements sold in juice bars aren't worth paying extra for.

IN A NUTSHELL

- There's nothing wrong with a juice or smoothie *from a juice bar as a snack, but don't waste your money on the herbal supplements — most are likely to be in quantities that are too small to have any effect, and some (such as citrin for slimming) have no proven health benefits in any quantity.*
- But there's more to it: *there are safety implications associated with several of the ingredients in the herbal supplements, including the herbs echinacea and guarana, and supplements in general aren't suitable for children and pregnant women.*



LITE WEGIAMAN

Juice bars are springing up all over the place. You can choose a drink from the menu or pick your own fruit and veg combination, and then they get juiced or blended on the spot, guaranteeing freshness. And this is great: for years we've been told we need to eat more fruit and vegies and less junk food, and now juice bars are handing us a healthy alternative to fast food on a plate (well, in a cup, anyway).

But in addition to this basic good product, some juice bars also sell 'supplements' that can be added to their drinks, and use clever marketing to advertise their claimed benefits. In fact you'd be forgiven for thinking that drinking a 'supplemented' juice will boost your immune system, improve your memory or help you lose weight.

The idea of getting benefits like these in a drink is appealing, and many of us are easily influenced to opt for the quick fix — who'd turn their nose up at good health in a cup? But of course there's a catch.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS

Some of the supplements sold in juice bars contain ingredients like whey and soy protein, spirulina, chamomile and green tea, which have long been used as or in foods. And others include vitamins and minerals, which can contribute to your recommended daily intake. But many contain herbs like ginkgo biloba and echinacea, which have traditionally been used as medicines, and these are a different kettle of fish.

First, unless these herbs are of good quality, are added to juices or smoothies in the right quantities, and then you buy and drink them on a regular basis, they're unlikely to have much, if any, effect. Despite this, health benefits are implied by the way some of the drinks are marketed, so they raise expectations that are unlikely to be met.

Second, just because herbs are natural, it doesn't mean they're 100% safe. A number of the herbal ingredients in juice bar supplements have contraindications — meaning that they can interfere with some medications or affect people with specific health conditions.

We asked juice bar chains **BOOST**, **DOCTOR JUICE**, **FEELING FRUITY**, **JUICE FUSION**, **KICK!**, **NRGIZE** and **PULP** about the supplements they sell, looked at information provided on menu boards, company websites and leaflets, and spoke to experts to fill in the whole juice bar picture beyond the marketing.

NOT LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE

Several juice bars name their drinks to reflect the claimed therapeutic properties of the supplement they contain. For example, ginkgo biloba, which may improve brain function and help with memory, appears to be the key 'active' ingredient in **Memory Juice** from **NRGIZE**. Echinacea is claimed to stimulate the immune system and help prevent or treat respiratory infections such as colds and flu — and

so we have **BOOST**'s **Protector Juice** (formerly called **Immunity Juice**), which contains echinacea, along with vitamin C and zinc.

Herbalists recommend that to have health benefits, herbs (like medicines) need to be taken in the right amount and frequency. As one herbalist put it, nobody would take one tenth of their blood pressure medication once, and expect it to lower their blood pressure. And generally speaking, taking a herbal supplement isn't like taking paracetamol for a headache, where one dose may be enough to make you feel better.

Medicinal herbs are complex substances. Extracts can vary in quality and strength depending on the plant species or part of the plant used (among other things), and not all available extracts of herbs are effective. And some only have an effect at a very specific standardised dose, in particular formulations. This is the case for both echinacea and ginkgo biloba — the wrong extract or dose may provide no benefits whatsoever.

Supplements used by juice bars are usually powdered blends of one or more active ingredients (herbs and vitamins, for example) mixed with a base — frequently maltodextrin, a form of sugar derived from cornstarch. The amount of supplement added to drinks can be around half a teaspoon, but the amount of active ingredient in that dose is going to be much smaller. And depending on how well the powder has been mixed, the concentration in each spoonful may vary.

From the information we received from the juice bars, it was often difficult to judge the actual concentration of individual ingredients in the supplements. But where we did receive specific dosage information, for many ingredients it was so low the effect is likely to be negligible.

NRGIZE told us its dosages are based on recommended safe doses. And **BOOST** advised us that its dosage levels are based on the intake of a healthy adult — supplements aren't added in therapeutic doses as their drinks are food products, not therapeutic products for addressing an illness.

While low doses of supplements like vitamins can still contribute to a healthy diet, this isn't the case with medicinal herbs. If the doses are too small to provide the herb's supposed benefit, it begs the question: why are they added at all?

SAFETY CONCERNS

In a way it's fortunate that the herbal supplements are unlikely to have any effect because, as noted earlier, 'natural' herbal supplements aren't automatically safe. Whether they're taken in the form of a drink or as a medicine, a few herbs in particular should be treated with caution.

TAMARA GRAHAM

- **Echinacea:** Generally it's well tolerated, but some people are allergic to it, and those with an allergy to any member of the *Asteraceae* (daisy) family should avoid it. A very small amount of herb can trigger an allergic reaction.
- **Ginkgo biloba:** This can interfere with other medications, such as anticoagulants (blood-thinning medication), so you should be cautious about combining the two. And it's not recommended in pregnancy.
- **Siberian ginseng:** This is used to relieve stress and boost the immune system, but it shouldn't be used in pregnancy and care should be taken if you have high blood pressure.

Moves towards better regulation?

It's not just juice bars that are using herbs in their products. Some local cafes have started to sell juices with supplements too, and there's a variety of drinks and food available in shops these days that are supplemented with medicinal herbs.

Our national food regulator, FSANZ, is currently assessing the use of medicinal or 'non-culinary' herbs in foods. In CHOICE's view their use in all foods should be prohibited unless specific permission is given for their inclusion — and then only after safety assessment and approval before they're put on sale.

If permitted, herbs should be added at a level that's both safe and effective. And clear cautions should be obvious at the point of sale so that people who need to avoid certain herbs are alerted to the potential risks.

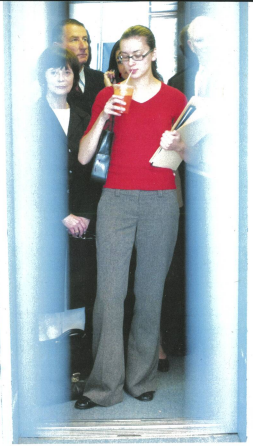
Until their use in food has been thoroughly investigated by FSANZ, we'd steer clear of the herbal supplements and stick to the basic juices or smoothies.

Supplement know-how

During their job training, juice bar staff are taught, among other things, the recipes for each drink, and which supplements to add. But the amount of training given to staff about the potential benefits and side effects of these supplements varies.

Some receive training on the properties of the supplements and their effects and potential adverse effects. Alternatively, information about the supplement properties may simply be available in an operational manual.

But they're unlikely to be trained health professionals, so we wouldn't advise that you heed the following suggestion from **PULP:** "Our crew know all there is to know about what goes into our drinks. Ask for the daily special or a recommendation for that head cold."



Guarana: Due to its high caffeine content, guarana isn't suitable for kids or pregnant women. It may interact with a variety of medicines, and can cause problems for people who are sensitive to caffeine. In big doses — particularly when you're getting caffeine from other sources too — it may set off an anxiety attack. While most people know how many cups of coffee they can handle in a day, the same can't be said for guarana, particularly with the way it's sold in juice bars, where you don't know how much you're getting. So it would be helpful if all juice bars displayed clear and obvious warnings about it at the sales counter.

Most juice bars give warnings on their websites and menu leaflets (available to customers at the point of sale), essentially saying that supplements aren't suitable for children or pregnant women. Several even specify that supplements should be used under medical supervision, and that you should consult your doctor before taking them.

But most of us probably wouldn't read the fine print in leaflets before ordering a drink, or check it out on a website — assuming we have access to the internet. Many of us probably also have faith in our food regulations and think anything that's potentially harmful wouldn't be allowed on sale in the first place,

DRINK OR SLIM

Many of us would love to shed a few kilos, particularly at this time of year when the weather's warmer and we're revealing a bit more flesh.

Juice bars have jumped on the weight-loss bandwagon with supplements such as **Skinny BOOST, TrimKICK!** or **Slimmers.** The names suggest that if you add them to your drink they'll help you to slim down and lose weight. According to some juice bar menus and websites, these supplements will help control or suppress your appetite and reduce cravings. As always, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

The active ingredient common to all these supplements is citrin, the more common name for *Garcinia cambogia*, a herb rich in hydroxycitric acid, which allegedly promotes weight loss. But there's little evidence from good-quality human clinical trials that citrin does help with weight loss or appetite suppression, and experts tell us its usefulness is highly debatable.

For a snapshot look at what juice bar staff were telling customers about their 'slimming' supplements, our researcher visited a total of 15 Sydney outlets of leading juice bar chains **BOOST** and **PULP.** At each visit she bought a drink with a 'slimming' supplement and asked the person who served her what the supplement does.

In seven instances she was told that it acted as an appetite suppressant, in three stores she was advised that it affects metabolism and two staff members — one from each chain — told her that the supplement makes you lose weight. For a herb with debatable and unproven benefits in any of these areas, these are pretty strong statements.

Our advice is to ignore juice bars' weight loss claims and 'slimming' supplements. If you're trying to lose weight, having a fruit-based drink (with or without supplement) instead of eating muffins or chips might get you results, but they're unlikely to be due to the supplement.

In fact if you're watching what you eat it'd make sense to check the nutrition info for juice bar drinks (assuming any is available) before you buy one. Drinks with 'slimming' supplements aren't always lower in sugar or kilojoules than other menu items, so they might even be worse than non 'slimming' drinks in terms of weight loss.

Also, watch out for the larger drink sizes, which can provide around 2000 kJ (or more) — roughly a quarter of the total daily energy requirements for the average adult woman (and even more for those trying to lose weight). And just a small smoothie may contain as much as 60 g — equivalent to 12 teaspoons — of sugar. While it comes from the fruit and so isn't just empty calories, it's still a lot.

and so never give the supplements a thought regarding potential risk.

Given that it would be awkward (and even offensive) for staff to ask female customers if they're pregnant, or check the ID of young teenagers, these warnings should be made more obvious — perhaps displayed on the shop's menu board where they can be seen by everyone when they're deciding what to buy. We were pleased when **NRGIZE** contacted us as we were going to press to advise us it was in the process of updating all menu boards so that they carry the same warning as on the website.

OVER-THE-TOP CLAIMS

Health claims made for drinks with medicinal herbs don't just waste your money and raise expectations that are unlikely to be met. They can be close to the edge legally or just plain wrong.

Claims that a food has a therapeutic or preventive action on health are prohibited under the Food Standards Code. The same goes for any claim or statement that the food can help you lose weight (see *Drink or slim?*, below left, for more on this). But some juice bars are treading a fine line.

PULP, in a takeaway menu we picked up at a store at the time of writing, says its **Lifeguard** juice (with ginseng and spirulina) will "restore your immune and digestive system" — which sounds like a health claim to us. We pointed this out to **PULP**, and a representative told us that new literature won't carry this statement.

However, if the implied health benefit is part of a product name that's a registered trademark — such as **BOOST**'s supplement **Stress Relief BOOST** with chamomile, passion flower and ginkgo biloba — it's outside the control of food regulators.

And some juice bar claims about the herbs they include in supplements are tenuous, and worrying if someone believed them. We noticed the following information about echinacea on the website of a mobile juice bar chain that wasn't included in our main survey: "Echinacea ... is used for boils, erysipelas, septicaemia, cancer, syphilis and other impurities of the blood, its action being antiseptic." The implication that it may be useful for treating cancer and any of the other problems listed is dubious, and it concerns us that someone might read and believe such poor-quality information.

CHOICE VERDICT

With their basic drinks, juice bars are providing a great alternative to fast food. But adding medicinal herbs to them isn't adding any value, health or otherwise. If they were present in amounts likely to have any effect (and so be worth spending your money on), some of them would be a health risk for some people. Save your money and stick to the basic juices and smoothies. ■

A day's goodness in every drink?

Juices and smoothies are made from fresh fruit and veg that are packed with beneficial vitamins and minerals, and they can add variety to your diet — especially if they're made using fresh fruits with a limited season, such as antioxidant-rich berries.

But to claim that they contain "All your nutrition in a single drink", as **PULP** does, is an exaggeration. Vitamin C and a number of other nutrients, yes, but some vitamins and many minerals are missing. For example, they provide little, if any, iron — a nutrient that many women and teenage girls in particular need more of.

Juices and smoothies can contribute to the recommended amount of fruit and vegies you eat in a day, but a drink isn't a substitute for eating whole fruit and veg, no matter how much it contains. For a start, extracted juices lack fibre, which has a role to play in protection against cancer and heart disease, and also helps fill you up so you'll be less tempted to snack on other things.

Wheatgrass: nutrition shortcut in a shot?

TAMARA GRAHAM

Wouldn't it be great if you could take all the vegies you know you should be eating, condense them into a manageable liquid shot, and be done with it? If you believe the claims, 30 mL of juiced wheatgrass does just that.

It's reported to be nutritionally equivalent to a whole kilo of vegies, and as **BOOST** puts it, "a whole lot easier to swallow". Not only that, but according to **NEW ZEALAND NATURAL** — an ice cream chain with juices, smoothies and supplements, including wheatgrass, on the menu — it's a "blood cleanser" and an "energy tonic". **PULP** suggests it enhances strength and endurance.

Unfortunately there's little scientific evidence that juiced wheatgrass provides these benefits. And while it may be a good way of getting a limited amount of a whole range of nutrients, it's certainly not a direct substitute for a kilo of vegies. Plus, if it's extracted juice, there's no fibre in it.

On the other hand it's probably harmless, and makes an interesting alternative to a coffee or Coke — as long as you can bear the taste!

FINALLY: CHEAPER INSURANCE?

Beat high sales commissions by buying online.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **How to get cheaper** *policies on the internet, and Best Buys for travel to the US.*
- **For the full guide** *to buying travel insurance and Best Buys for various destinations, subscribe to* CHOICE Money & Rights *by phoning 1800 069 552 toll-free or going to www.choice.com.au/magazines.*

Independent research by CHOICE's new *Money & Rights* magazine has revealed just how expensive Australian travel insurance can be.

One factor contributing to this high cost is commission rates for companies like the insurance agents and travel agents that sell policies. Travel agents have traditionally sold the majority of all travel policies, and can keep a high proportion of your premium or add a mark-up to the insurer's net price. Some companies selling **ALLIANZ**-underwritten policies, for example, can keep up to 55% of your base premium, **HBF** pays commission rates up to 38% and **QBE** up to 50%. Flight Centre can receive up to 56% of what you pay for **COVER-MORE** policies.

So insurance commissions and agents' mark-ups have plenty of room to come down, hopefully leading to better prices for consumers.

INTERNET TO THE RESCUE

In fact CHOICE *Money & Rights* found that some prices have started to come down — the web now gives you a better chance of finding a reasonable deal, and if you have easy web access it's no less convenient than buying insurance from your travel agent.

The entry of internet discounters, including travel agents, which have lower costs and are prepared to forgo some of their commission, means more price competition. Their policies may be significantly cheaper (up to 40%) than through travel agents or insurers who don't sell direct or through discount channels. And this new competition may put pressure on travel agents to discount their prices too.

While not all policies are discounted online, including some policies with good cover, plenty are. Be sure to check what the policy insures, though — cover is sometimes reduced for online policies, so make sure a cheap price still gets you the cover you want. See *How to find cheaper policies*, right, for some websites to check out.

BEST TRAVEL INSURANCE FOR 23 DAYS IN THE US

		PREMIUMS ($)						COVER LIMITS ($)				
Company and policy	Score (%)	Adult	Couple	Couple with two kids	Age limit for this premium	Additional premium for older travellers	Excess ($)*	Medical	Cancellation	Liability	Delay	Bag
TOP THREE POLICIES												
HBF Gold **(A)**	77	211 **(A)**	384 **(A)**	384 **(A)**	89 **(C)**	No **(C)**	100	Unlimited	Unlimited	2,500,000	1000	100
AUSSIETRAVELCOVER Super Plus	74	215	409	430	75	25–44% **(D)**	100	Unlimited	Unlimited	5,000,000	2000	100
COVER-MORE Options Area 1 **(B)**	73	198	396	396	69	Case-by-case	100 **(B)**	Unlimited	Unlimited	2,500,000	1200	120
BEST CHEAP POLICIES												
1COVER Fully Comprehensive (Worldwide)	68	132	250	263	75	$50–$150	100	Unlimited	Unlimited	5,000,000	2000	50
COLUMBUS DIRECT Worldwide	61	99	177	197	64	Not covered	125	12,500,000	12,500	5,000,000	500	62

How to find cheaper policies

Buy online if you can get a discounted policy that suits your needs, but remember to check the level of cover, which is sometimes reduced for policies sold on the net. (And you may not be able to buy online if you need cover for a pre-existing medical condition.) Here are some websites offering discounts over the internet:

- 1cover.com.au sells policies underwritten by **ALLIANZ** but with lower commission than some agents. However, some of its cover levels aren't quite the same — for example, 1cover has a lower baggage loss allowance.
- **CGU** gives a 20% discount on its policies bought through www.cgu.com.au.
- **COLUMBUS DIRECT** (www.columbusdirect.com.au) was often the cheapest insurer surveyed and sells its policies online and over the phone. However, the cover is often lower than from other insurers.
- www.travel.com.au: a travel agent and authorised representative of **QBE**, it sells **QBE**'s policies at a 15–20% discount. The company says its policies are exactly the same as those **QBE** sells directly.
- www.travelinsuranceaustralia.com.au sells policies of eight different companies (including insurers and agents) at a 7–15% discount.

And finally: **haggle**. You don't need a modem or mouse to find a good deal; high commissions leave plenty of room to negotiate with agents, who may well give you a discount.

TAMARA GRAHAM

Policy comparison

CHOICE *Money & Rights* surveyed 13 companies and around 70 policies in total. This slice of the market includes policies originating from the main underwriters, including **ALLIANZ, AMERICAN HOME ASSURANCE, CGU, HBF, LLOYDS OF LONDON, QBE** and **VERO** (formerly **ROYAL AND SUN ALLIANCE**).

Policies were scored out of 100, with the following weightings:

- Baggage and belongings: 28%.
- Cancellation and other expenses: 27%.
- Legal cover: 15%.
- Medical cover: 30%.

The table lists the three top-scoring policies, as well as two cheaper ones with a reasonable policy score, for 23 days in the US. (While cheaper policies from companies like **COLUMBUS DIRECT** may suit some travellers, the level of cover is more restricted, which explains their lower scores.) CHOICE *Money & Rights* also lists the best policies for other destinations.

e / ible limit†	Cash covered	Contact details
3000		133 423, www.hbf.com.au
3000	✓	1800 888 448, www.aussietravelcover.com.au
3500	✓	1300 728 822, www.covermore.com.au
3000	✓	1300 368 344, www.1cover.com.au
750 **(E)**	✓	1300 669 999, www.columbusdirect.com.au

* *For most claims; an excess-free period sometimes applies.*

** *These are the cover limits for individuals; they're often bigger for couples and families.*

† *A camera, for example.*

(A) *10% discount for HBF members.*

(B) *With $100 excess; nil and $250 excess are also available with different premiums. Most companies offer an excess buyout.*

(C) *But conditions apply for over 70s.*

(D) *25% for 76–80-year-olds; 44% 81 and over.*

(E) *No extra cover for specified valuables.*

TIPS

- ***Medical cover:*** *The Insurance Council of Australia recommends you have unlimited medical cover for trips to the US, Japan and Europe. Daily hospital costs in the US can approach $10,000, while medical evacuations to Australia regularly cost up to $300,000. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has known of families having to sell off assets such as super or the family home to bring loved ones without insurance back to Australia for treatment.*
- *If you hire a* **rental car**, *is the excess you'd have to pay after an accident covered by your travel insurance? Buying the excess waiver from the rental car company can be much more expensive.*
- *You can't be forced to buy a* **tour operator's insurance;** *if they claim it's superior, compare cover, exclusions and price with other policies.*

TRAPS

- *Most policies cover* **cancellation** *because of a serious illness of a close relative, but some limit this to relatives aged under 76 or even younger, and exclude those with pre-existing conditions or living outside Australia.*
- *Some policies don't cover cancellation because you're* **retrenched** *from your employment; others may cap travel agent cancellation fees you can claim.*
- *No company in* Money & Rights' *survey covers cancellation expenses if you decide you no longer want to travel because of* **terrorism** *at your destination.*
- *No policy covers the money you've already paid if the airline or travel agent goes* **out of business.** *Check your agent is a member of the Travel Compensation Fund (www.tcf.org.au), which might provide compensation in this situation.*

Sparkling wines for al

You can drink bubbly to celebrate an occasion, or ju

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IN A NUTSHELL

- **Five wine experts tasted** *78 sparkling wines and champagnes ranging in price from less than $5 to more than $250. At least half of them are worth a second sip.*
- **Our traditional CHOICE Mixed Dozen** *is a baker's dozen this year and includes the top wines from all price brackets. Nine of the 13 bottles cost less than $20 and two of those even less than $5.*
- **Highest scores went to the** *most expensive champagne in the test as well as to a much more affordable drop.*

It's the drink of love and romance, of joy and celebration — the drink you pour to mark an occasion. But what if there's no special event on the horizon and you just don't want to wait to hear the corks pop?

Well, you're not alone if you want to enjoy a drop of champagne more often than just at special events. Napoleon Bonaparte is said to have loved to drink it after a victory to celebrate, but also after a defeat for consolation.

And Lily Bollinger, the young widow who ran the famous champagne house between 1941 and 1977, is said to have replied with these famous words to the question why she drank champagne:

"I only drink champagne when I'm happy, and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone. When I have company I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not hungry and drink it when I am. Otherwise I never touch it — unless I'm thirsty."

So, if you, too, love the bubbles that tickle your nose and the wonderful aromas and flavours of a good sparkling wine or champagne, read on. We taste-tested 78 of the most popular sparkling whites, reds and champagnes, and with more than half of these selling for less than $20, you don't have to break the bank to indulge in your favourite drop.

THE TASTING

Considering you're probably guided by price when choosing a bottle, we split the sparkling whites into four price brackets — less than $10, $10 to less than $20 and $20 to $50, with the champagnes (and one Australian premium sparkling) falling into the fourth price range of more than $50. The popular sparkling reds we found sell for less than $20 and are listed as a group at the end of the table.

On pages 17–19, all the tasted wines are listed in rank order within these groups. Our tasters — five experts from the wine industry (see page 16) — are trained to ignore personal preferences. When judging a wine, they simply look for attributes that indicate the wine is well made and has no particular faults. The score they award reflects how well it's made.

occasions

cause ...

For example, a score of 14 to 15 points (out of 20) indicates the wine's OK, no faults, but nothing special either. At wine shows, a wine that scores 15.5–16.9 points is awarded a bronze medal, 17–18.4 points a silver and 18.5 or more a gold medal.

This year very few bottles were corked. Cork taint (TCA) contaminates the cork and leaves the wine smelling and tasting musty, 'cardboardy' or like a hessian bag. Corked wines weren't rated; the experts asked for a second bottle and based their scores on that one.

A MATTER OF TASTE

Taste is a very personal thing. Within any group of people, chances are you'll find different tastes, including in wine. While one person might like a light, fruity wine, another might prefer a zesty, fresh aperitif style, or a more complex one with lots of layers of different flavours.

We've included in the table some of the notes the experts jotted down when tasting the wines. Here you'll find out which sort of aromas and flavours the wine displays — fruity or floral, earthy or tangy, yeasty or meaty, to name a few. These notes should give you an idea of the wine's style so you can judge for yourself whether it might appeal to you.

To see whether ordinary people share the experts' views, we also held a lay panel tasting with a few of the wines the experts rated well, poorly or couldn't agree upon.

Interestingly, both groups' judgment was consistent for many of the better-rated, expensive sparkling wines, for the three wines at the top of the table for under $10 and for the **SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut** from the second price bracket.

Just like the experts, the amateurs disliked the **SEPPELT Fleur de Lys Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2001** ($17) and **YALDARA Sparkling Burgundy,** and they weren't too impressed with **SEPPELT Original Sparkling Shiraz 2002**, which some of the experts liked and some didn't.

Only for one wine did the opinions vary considerably: the experts liked the **BANROCK STATION The Reserve Pinot Noir Chardonnay** best in the $10–$20 price bracket, but the amateurs didn't like it.

THE CHOICE MIXED DOZEN

Below is our traditional Mixed Dozen (a baker's dozen this year) — a selection of top-scoring wines from all price brackets. There are five bubblies from the cheap end of the market — including two of the cheapest of all that scored pretty well — and the top two from every other price band.

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$$ indicates good value in this price range.

Less than $10	Price
HARDY'S Regional Reserve Classic Cuvée	$7.80
BLUES POINT Brut Reserve	$8.00
$$ MATTHEW LANG Brut Cuvée	$4.50
$$ RENMANO River Breeze Sparkling Cuvée	$4.00
WOLF BLASS Eaglehawk Cuvée Brut	$8.00
$10 to less than $20	
$$ BANROCK STATION The Reserve Pinot Noir Chardonnay	$13.00
SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	$16.50
$20 to $50	
CHANDON Vintage Brut 1999	$35.80
$$ SIR JAMES Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2000	$22.20
More than $50	
MOËT & CHANDON DOM PÉRIGNON Cuvée 1996	$251.50
VEUVE CLICQUOT Ponsardin Brut	$86.50
Sparkling reds	
ANDREW GARRETT Sparkling Burgundy	$16.00
BANROCK STATION The Reserve Sparkling Shiraz	$13.00

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM

Thanks to our tasters

Our thanks go to the experts who sniffed, slurped and spat their way through 78 wines to give us their verdict. We particularly appreciate the efforts of those who travelled from afar and had their night cut short to make our 9 o'clock start of the tasting in downtown Sydney. Pictured are, left to right:

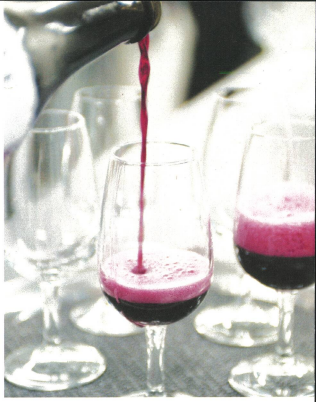
- Michael Davey, wine retailer, Liquorland/Vintage Cellars.
- Louella McPhan, winemaker, Seppelt Great Western.
- Geoff Skurray, Professor of Oenology, School of Science, Food and Horticulture, University of Western Sydney.
- Ed Carr, winemaker, BRL Hardy.
- Mark Richardson, winemaker, Tyrrell's Vineyards.

Good enough to keep?

When you find a sparkling wine you really like, don't be tempted to buy vast quantities to keep for the future. In general, champagne and sparkling wine are ready to drink when they appear on retailers' shelves. They're usually at their best then and won't improve with age. In particular, storing them under adverse conditions can speed up their deterioration process.

So it's best to buy your bubbly when you're ready to drink it. And if you're after expensive champagne, seek out a reputable retailer who can be seen to have a high stock turnover and to keep the bottles under favourable conditions: away from the sun, other heat sources and fluorescent light.

It's better not kept in the fridge for long either (by you or the shop) — wine's best kept around 12–14°C, and you serve it chilled (around 4–8°C), not freezing cold. To chill it, put it in the fridge for a few hours or in a bucket of ice and water for around 30 minutes.



Some fizzics

While pouring some 600 glasses of sparkling wine for both the professional and amateur tastings, we couldn't help but notice a few differences in the quality of the bubbles (technically calle the 'bead').

The better sparkling wines have smaller bubbles that form a creamy foam (or 'mousse') on the top of the wine. Scientists (French, of course) recently found there's a fine film of tiny particles, too small to see with the naked eye, on the surface of the wine. These minute bits of protein and sugar, left over from the winemaking process, help the bubbles hang around for longer. The film increases the liquid's surface tension, making the bubbles strong and stable — in much the same way as som washing-up liquids generate longer-lasting bubbles.

Brand (in rank order within price brackets)	1 Score out of 20	2 Price paid ($)	Origin	Alcohol (%)	3 Additives	4 Tasting notes
LESS THAN $10						
HARDY'S Regional Reserve Classic Cuvée	16	7.80	Australia	11.0	220	Pale straw colour, green highlights, fine bead, good mousse; aromatic nose with lifted musky, floral and tropical fruit aromas; good intensity, nice balance, not cloying — fresh and aromatic.
BLUES POINT Brut Reserve	15.5	8.00	Australia	11.5	220	Golden colour with green hue, big bubbles; developed, rich nose with honey, butterscotch and fruit aromas; richer, creamy palate, good length, good acid, a touch cloying — aged but still lively.
MATTHEW LANG Brut Cuvée	15.5	4.50	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour, green tinge, fine bead, good mousse; fresh nose with aromatic tropical fruit aromas; cheesy palate with tangy acidity adding length and balance — good acid/sugar balance.
RENMANO River Breeze Sparkling Cuvée	15.5	4.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale green colour, persistent mousse; fresh and flowery nose with tropical fruit aromas; soft, round palate with sweet stone-fruit flavours and buttery finish — fresh, sherbet-like.
WOLF BLASS Eaglehawk Cuvée Brut	15.5	8.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour; confectionery and yeast aromas and slightly musty, earthy, spicy notes; rich texture, tangy citrus flavours, hints of oak, buttery finish — light, sweet, fruity.
CARRINGTON Vintage Brut 2003	15	5.50	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour, green tinge, fine bead, good mousse; aromatic nose with grassy and fruit aromas; juicy upfront apple and citrus flavours, crisp finish, acid length — lively, fresh style.
KILLAWARRA Premium Australian Brut	15	8.90	Australia	11.5	220	Deep straw colour, green highlights; ripe stone-fruit aromas with some buttery/malo characters; complex toast and strawberry and cream flavours — aged, but lively elegance and length.
MINCHINBURY Brut de Brut Private Cuvée	15	5.00	Australia	11.5	220	Medium straw colour, green highlights, fine bubbles, good mousse; jasmine-scented with fruit and musk aromas; fresh palate with green apple and yeast flavours — good acid balance, good flavour.
QUEEN ADELAIDE Brut	15	5.95	Australia	11.5	220	Light straw colour, good mousse; tropical fruit and confectionery aromas and flinty/mineral notes; sweet fruits and lively acid but finishes short — clean, fresh, lacks intensity.
SEPPELT Great Western Brut Reserve	15	6.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw/green colour; consistent mousse and bead; lifted, aromatic nose with fresh fruits and ice cream characters; citrus flavours, slightly sweet, green apple finish — light, fresh, pleasant.
SEPPELT Great Western Imperial Reserve	15	6.00	Australia	11.5	220	Bright straw colour with green highlights, thick mousse; light, fresh yeast aromas over floral fruit; creamy mousse, nice fruit and subtle toast flavours — simple, slightly sweet, short.
LINDEMANS Bin 25 Brut Cuvée	14.5	8.00	Australia	12.0	220	Bright golden colour, green highlights, steady bead; complex nougat, honey and toast aromas that carry through to the palate with a fruit lift and a soft finish — lacking zest.
McGUIGAN The Black Label Sparkling Chardonnay	14.5	8.00	Australia	13.0	220	Golden colour, hints of green, very fine bead; toasty, baked apple aromas with a slight rubber/glue character; creamy palate, fruit lift at front, soft finish — aged, but lacks elegance.
MINCHINBURY Fine Private Cuvée	14.5	5.80	Australia	11.5	220	Pale onion-skin colour, steady bead; slightly dank pinot-strawberry nose with lifted dusty, spicy/foxy notes; dry, delicate apple flavours with crisp acidity, fair length — a touch simple.
MINCHINBURY White Seal Private Cuvée	14.5	4.50	Australia	11.5	220	Straw colour, green highlights, thick mousse; grassy/earthy nose with ice cream and fresh fruit aromas; sweet, round, tropical and stone-fruit flavours — a touch too cloying and boring.
SEAVIEW Brut	14.5	7.75	Australia	11.5	220	Deep straw colour; aged, aromatic nose with complex nougat, toast and meaty/smoked aromas; creamy mousse, complex palate with foxy/spicy aromas, crisp acidity — older, a bit stale.
SEAVIEW Brut de Brut	14.5	7.00	Australia	11.5	220	Deep straw colour; strong yeast/bread character over fruit; fairly short-lived nutty, toasty flavours, astringent — big style, but doesn't carry age well.
SEAVIEW Grande Cuvée	14.5	7.00	Australia	11.5	220	Medium straw colour, fine bead; aged and slightly reduced nose with complex stone-fruit and toast aromas; soft, round palate with generous fruit flavours — big, simple, dry white with fizz.
CARRINGTON Brut Reserve	14	4.90	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour, green highlights, fine bead; very reduced nose with aromas of Bonox, fruit salad and lead pencil; creamy mousse, complex savoury flavours — reduced and vegetative.
McWILLIAM'S Hanwood Estate Pinot Noir Chardonnay Brut	14	7.95	Australia	11.5	220, 300	Pale straw colour; fine bead, good mousse; reduced and slightly aldehydic nose with hints of fruit and milk; tannic and short on the palate with apple and pear flavours — short and tannic.
MINCHINBURY Brut Private Cuvée	14	5.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour, green highlights, fine bead; aromatic muscatel nose with lolly shop and tropical fruit aromas; very sweet palate with strong biscuit characters lifted by fruit — aged and tired.
FREIXENET Cordon Negro Brut	13.5	8.95	Spain	11.5	220	Pale straw colour; green highlights; reduced and rubbery nose with aged, aromatic fruit aromas; earthy, mushroom flavours on the palate, short, too old — lacks bubbles, acid and flavour.
BETWEEN $10 and $20						
BANROCK STATION The Reserve Pinot Noir Chardonnay	17	13.00	Australia	12.5	220	Bright golden colour, fine bead; nutty and aldehydic nose with toast and savoury aromas; rich, round palate with complex toasty flavours and zesty citrus notes — strong palate, well balanced.
SIR JAMES Cuvée Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16.5	16.50	Australia	12.0	220	Bright straw colour, fine bead; perfume and confectionery nose with yeasty and citrus aromas; richly textured, generous fruit, strawberries and cream flavours — soft, complex, drinkable.
JACOB'S CREEK Chardonnay Pinot Noir Brut Cuvée	16	12.00	Australia	12.0	220	Golden colour, green highlights, fine bead; fresh yeast with aged but lively fruit aromas, hint of tobacco and toast; fruit with hints of yeast complexity, long — well structured, good acid.
OMNI Blue	16	11.80	Australia	9.0	220	Pale green colour, large bubbles; aromatic, lifted musky and floral aromas; luscious and fruity, good acid, sweet, good depth, clean finish — good, vibrant, fresh, fruity/sweet style.
OMNI NV	16	10.00	Australia	12.0	220	Bright straw colour, fine bead; complex nose with subtle toasty and citrus aromas; lemon and apple flavours with complex yeast character — aged, old Aussie style.
GLASS MOUNTAIN Classic Brut	15.5	10.00	Australia	11.5	220	Medium straw colour, good mousse and bead; lifted fruity nose with musk and honeysuckle aromas; sweet and youthful, soft and creamy, juicy, poor acid balance — fresh and fruity.
HENKELL TROCKEN Dry Sec	15.5	18.50	Germany	11.5	220	Medium straw colour, fine mousse and bead; complex but developed mushroom and nutty aromas; sweet, fruity with reduced character dominant, finishes crisp — well balanced, clean.
WOLF BLASS Red Label Non Vintage Chardonnay Pinot Noir	15.5	14.50	Australia	11.0	220	Pale straw colour, good mousse, fine bead; apple and anise-like aromas give a fruity, spicy lift; soft, creamy and fresh palate with straightforward apple flavours — fair wine, interesting, soft.
ANDREW GARRETT Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15	16.00	Australia	11.5	220	Medium straw colour, fine bead; confectionery nose, hints of strawberry and woodchip aromas; good fruit and acid balance but short and simple palate lacking flavour — lacks finesse.

Brand (in rank order within price brackets)	1 Score out of 20	2 Price paid ($)	Origin	Alcohol (%)	3 Additives	4 Tasting notes
BETWEEN $10 and $20 (continued)						
ORLANDO Trilogy Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier	15	11.95	Australia	12.5	220	Golden straw colour, fine bead; medicinal/meaty nose with hints of melon and nougat; sweet, lolly and oak flavours on a dirty, meaty palate lacking fruit intensity — table wine-like.
SIR JAMES Brut de Brut Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15	16.50	Australia	12.0	220	Deep yellow-green colour; complex Vegemite and toast nose with underlying fruit characters, a bit too developed; lifted front palate with fruit and yeast, good intensity and depth — a full, rich style.
YELLOWGLEN Yellow	15	11.10	Australia	11.0	220	Pale straw colour; fruity, simple nose with citrus fruit, apple and warm yeast aromas; young, simple fruit on the palate, soft and creamy texture, lacking complexity — light, fresh fruit style.
COCKATOO RIDGE NV Brut	14.5	11.50	Australia	12.0	220	Straw colour with pink highlights; yeast, strawberry and chemical aromas; creamy mousse, rather simple palate with strawberries and cream flavours — lacks elegance and short on acid.
GRANDIN Brut	14.5	15.50	France	11.5	220, 300	Golden straw colour, green hue, fine bead; aged nose with burnt rubber, mushroom and yeasty aromas; lemon sorbet flavours and candlewax characters, steely acidity, short — a touch hard.
LINDAUER Brut	14.5	14.00	NZ	12.0	220, 300	Deep straw colour, fine bead; simple, aged nose with aromas of fruit and dried flowers; strong fruit flavours, a touch of oak, phenolic, thin — lacks the finish.
LINDEMANS Reserve Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier 1999	14.5	13.00	Australia	12.0	220	Golden straw colour, fine bead; developed, creamy honey/nougat nose with toasted, nutty aromas; soft, round palate with coffee flavours — lots of age, but tired and lacking acid.
ROSEMOUNT V Chardonnay Pinot Noir	14.5	13.80	Australia	12.5	220	Pale golden colour, good bead; aromatic fruit aromas with some developed toast and nougat notes; aged, stewed fruit flavours with creamy malo character, tangy acidity — lacks freshness.
YELLOWGLEN Vintage Crémant 2003	14.5	17.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour, green hue, fine bead and good mousse; slightly reduced yeast over aromatic-type fruit aromas; youthful, simple fruit flavours, cloying finish — lacks complexity.
YELLOWGLEN Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2003	14.5	17.00	Australia	11.5	220	Pale straw colour; subtle citrus nose with clean, fresh fruit aromas; sweet, soft palate, creamy mousse, tangy citrus flavours and some pencil/oak notes, steely finish — lacking intensity.
SEPPELT Fleur De Lys Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2001	14	17.00	Australia	12.0	220	Bright golden colour; aged, aromatic fruit nose with oily and slightly gluey notes; bread and butter flavours on the palate, lacking fruit lift, complexity and freshness — aged but clumsy.
Mixed emotions						
BROWN BROTHERS Pinot Noir & Chardonnay	13.5–18	19.50	Australia	12.0	220, 224	Bright straw colour; fruity, complex, yeast aromas with earthy notes; strong palate with mushroom, lanolin flavours — good intensity but an uneasy finish / fine strength and complexity.
SEPPELT Fleur De Lys Chardonnay Pinot Noir / Meunier	13.5–17	12.80	Australia	12.5	220	Pale straw colour; complex yeasty and stone-fruit aromas; rich style, good secondary flavours but a touch grubby on the finish — slight age and aldehyde / good intensity, but drying out a little.
SEAVIEW Pinot Noir Chardonnay Brut 1999	13–17	15.00	Australia	12.0	220	Deep straw-golden colour; aged, aromatic, nutty, buttery malo aromas over fruit base; rich and full, sweet, lacking acid twist, bread dough with fruit lift — past its best / old Aussie style.
SEAVIEW Special Reserve Chardonnay Pinot Noir	13–15.5	11.00	Australia	12.5	220	Medium straw colour; aged, ripe fruit and savoury aromas; rich and oily, sickly sweet, brine/oyster flavours, dominant earthy character — interesting, but lacks length and strength / pongy.
BETWEEN $20 and $50						
CHANDON Vintage Brut 1999	17.5	35.80	Australia	12.5	220	Bright golden colour, steady bead; lifted fruit and yeast aromas; clean, fresh, intense palate with mushroom, buttery and creamy flavours, wood age — rich, full-flavoured style, mouthfilling, soft.
SIR JAMES Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2000	17.5	22.20	Australia	13.0	220	Deep straw colour, very fine bead; well aged nose with aromas of citrus, burnt toast and truffle; soft, round palate with fruit and bready characters, big finish — great, racy acid and long flavour.
CHANDON NV	17	20.00	Australia	13.0	220	Medium straw colour, green hue, fine bead and mousse; fresh yeast and lifted fruit nose; fine and elegant palate with stone-fruit flavours, a little simple — lively style, strong palate.
CROSER Petaluma Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2001	17	33.30	Australia	13.0	220	Bright straw colour, green tinge, good bead; creamy yeast/malo nose with citrus aromas, slightly aldehydic; zingy acid, fresh fruit and yeast through palate — nicely balanced with great finesse.
GRANT BURGE Pinot Noir Chardonnay	17	22.00	Australia	12.0	220	Deep straw colour with copper tinge, creamy, developed nose with biscuity and fruit aromas; pear and quince fruit flavours, long and soft — a richer, full-bodied style with food intensity.
JANSZ Premium Non Vintage Cuvée	16.5	24.30	Australia	12.5	220	Light-green colour, fine bead; fresh, clean aromas of tobacco and citrus with subtle toasty notes; good acid, complexity and intensity, very long — creamy fruit style, lacking depth.
SEPPELT Salinger Traditional Method 2001	16.5	27.80	Australia	12.5	220	Mid straw colour, steady bead; milky, aromatic nose with apple and apricot aromas; soft, creamy, layered flavours of nuts, yeast and citrus fruit, strong acid, short finish — sweet and sour palate.
YARRA BURN Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier 2000	16	25.50	Australia	12.5	220	Golden straw colour; closed and aged nose with aromatic fruit and cheesy aromas and notes of strawberries and cream; full, sweet fruit palate of moderate length — a touch simple.
YELLOWGLEN Aged Release Vintage 2000	16	21.00	Australia	11.5	220	Mid straw colour, gold tinge, larger bead; complex bread, nutty and red fruit aromas; creamy mousse, well balanced, good acid and age, a little phenolic — lean and tight, complex style.
Mixed emotions						
DEUTZ Marlborough Cuvée Brut	14.5–19	23.00	NZ	12.0	220, 300	Light straw colour, fine bead; complex biscuity aromas, notes of hair oil and truffle; intense citrus and strawberries and cream flavours, creamy — great acid and tannin balance / poor finish.
MORE THAN $50						
MOËT & CHANDON DOM PÉRIGNON Cuvée 1996	19	251.50	France	12.5	220	Deep straw colour, lively bead; complex nose with red fruit, Asian spice and truffle aromas; tangy citrus and complex secondary flavours, strong acid backbone — freshness with complexity.
VEUVE CLICQUOT Ponsardin Brut	19	86.50	France	12.0	220	Deep straw colour, fine bead; complex toast and mushroom aromas, Vegemite with fruit lift; subtle strawberry and citrus and complex biscuity flavours — very good complexity, tremendous length.
BOLLINGER Grande Année 1996	18.5	184.50	France	12.0	220	Bright golden colour; pronounced aldehyde notes on the nose; big, powerful style, good acid lift over toasty fruit character, good balance, long-lasting — rich and full, not everyone's cup of tea.
BOLLINGER Special Cuvée	18.5	99.00	France	12.0	220	Bright golden colour; baked apple and nutty, aldehydic nose over fruit; complex palate with fruit and toasty flavours and hints of oak and aldehyde — full and lively, tremendous length.

MORE THAN $50 (continued)

LAURENT-PERRIER Brut	18.5	79.00	France	12.0	220	Bright golden colour, fine bead; closed, subtle nose with strawberries and cream aroma and some earthy notes; strong, tangy, sherbet-like flavours, lively and tight — full, complex and long.
LOUIS ROEDERER Brut Premier Champagne	18.5	90.00	France	12.0	220	Gold straw colour, fine bead; complex yeast nose with layers over fruit; aged palate with truffle, mushroom, smoke, fresh strawberry and lifted lemon flavours — elegant style.
MOËT & CHANDON Brut Imperial Champagne	18.5	66.65	France	12.0	220	Bright golden straw colour, green highlights, fine bead; toast and Vegemite nose with hints of red fruits; soft, creamy palate with toasty, bready and tangy citrus fruit flavours — rich, full, sweet.
PIPER-HEIDSIECK Brut Champagne	18.5	74.00	France	12.0	220, 300	Bright golden colour, fine bead; rich fruit and oak nose with a touch of yoghurt (pongy); soft, creamy mousse, Vegemite with fruit lift through the palate — complex, rich, strong and lingering.
POMMERY Brut Royal	18.5	55.55	France	12.5	220, 300	Deep straw colour, fine bead; complex nose with earthy and sweet figs/perfumed aromas, a hint of burnt rubber; soft and creamy palate, good length and balance — younger and well structured.
TAITTINGER Brut Reserve	18.5	78.50	France	12.0	220, 300	Bright golden colour, fine bead; complex biscuity and citrus aromas with hints of mushroom and hair oil; subtle nutty flavours with a flinty acid lift, very complex — great structure, great length.
ARRAS Chardonnay Pinot Noir 1998	18	60.00	Australia	12.0	220	Bright golden colour, fine bead; complex, big, layered fruit and bready aromas; delicate citrus flavours, lots of oyster and some brine — more citrus style, good, fresh, clean.
MOËT & CHANDON Millésimé Blanc Vintage Champagne 1998	18	100.00	France	12.5	220	Bright golden colour, fine bead; complex yeast/fruit aromas, pencil shaving, milk-shop character; big, strong palate with fresh lemon acid and crisp apple flavours — great depth and character.
BILLECART-SALMON Brut Reserve	17.5	82.50	France	12.0	220	Bright golden colour, fine bead; rich, milky nose with toasty, citrus and stone-fruit aromas and hints of acid, truffle; creamy palate with toasty and tangy citrus flavours — full, rich and complex.
SPARKLING REDS						
ANDREW GARRETT Sparkling Burgundy	17	16.00	Australia	13.0	220	Brick red/orange colour; tarry, complex nose with dark cherry, chocolate and spice aromas; complex, aged palate, sweet, plummy fruit flavours, well balanced — interesting, with some age.
BANROCK STATION The Reserve Sparkling Shiraz	17	13.00	Australia	14.0	220	Deep crimson colour; complex nose with dark cherry, cinnamon and berry fruit aromas; rich, complex palate with length of sweet fruits, spice and chocolate — simple and youthful style.
OMNI Red	16	11.80	Australia	14.0	220	Deep crimson colour; tangy and sweet nose with aromas of berry fruit, oak and ripe shiraz; fresh berry and oak flavours, a touch simple and confected — fresh, fruity style.
SEAVIEW Sparkling Shiraz	16	7.00	Australia	13.5	220	Cherry red colour; complex nose with berry, mint and chocolate aromas; aged shiraz characters (spicy pepper and fruit) on a long palate — simple, sweet and fruity.
McGUIGAN Black Label Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	8.00	Australia	13.5	220	Medium ruby-red colour; simple, youthful fruit aromas with chocolate and licorice notes; strong cherry and oak flavours, slightly developed — lacks weight and depth.
McWILLIAM'S Hanwood Estate Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	7.95	Australia	12.5	220	Cherry red colour; complex vanilla, oak, coconut and big jammy fruit aromas; ripe fruit flavours upfront on a soft palate but finishes green — good balance, sweet, a touch oaky on the finish.
YELLOWGLEN Red	15.5	12.00	Australia	12.0	220	Light garnet colour; earthy, weedy, farmyard characters on the nose; leathery, aged oak and sweet fruit flavours, earthy characters, good, soft finish — old, rustic style.
YALDARA Sparkling Burgundy	13	11.00	Australia	12.5	202, 220	Light tawny red colour; porty, dried fruit nose with developed, tarry, dank aromas; raisiny, stalky flavours (green fruit doesn't carry age), sweet and sour palate — past its best.
Mixed emotions						
SEPPELT Original Sparkling Shiraz 2002	15–18	19.50	Australia	14.5	220	Dark red colour; complex plum pudding, chocolate, mint and brown spice aromas; blackberry over oak flavours, even palate, slightly tannic finish — simple and lacks length / very good, complex.

1 Score

Each expert gave the sparkling wines a score out of 20, according to the international show-scoring system for wines: 3 for appearance, 7 for nose and 10 for palate. They tasted them in five brackets, as indicated in the table.

The tasters didn't know which wine they were tasting, only in which bracket it fell. While they used the same benchmarks for judging all the wines, they were probably a bit harsher in their judgment of the more expensive wines. So the scores are only comparable within, not between, the price brackets.

The score printed in the table is the panellists' consensus score reached after the tasting, when they discussed the wines and their individual scores — still without knowing what the wines were. It's usually the average of the experts' scores.

In a few instances when a wine received too wide a range of scores and no consensus could be reached, we called it a *Mixed emotion*. For these wines we've included two, sometimes contradictory, overall comments in the tasting notes that reflect the tasters' views. If it sounds like something that might match your taste, give it a try.

2 Price

This is the price we paid in September 2004, rounded to the nearest five cents. Shop around for the best deal, and watch out for specials.

3 Additives

Most sparkling wines have one or more preservatives added:

- Sulphur dioxide (220) prevents browning of the grapes (oxidation) and acts as a preservative. Many people with asthma are sensitive to sulphur dioxide and it could cause an attack. As a rule, champagne and sparkling wines contain less than still white wines because the carbon dioxide in them is a natural preservative.
- Other additives include the antioxidant ascorbic acid (vitamin C, 300) and preservatives such as potassium sorbate (202) and potassium metabisulphite (224).
- Many of the wines in our test also list milk or egg products, which are used as fining agents to help clarify the wine. If traces of these products remain in the end product, they have to be listed on the label to warn people sensitive to them.

4 Tasting notes

These are compiled from the experts' tasting notes on the wine's colour and appearance, nose, palate and overall impression. Combined with the scores they should give you a good indication of the wine's style, aroma and flavour.

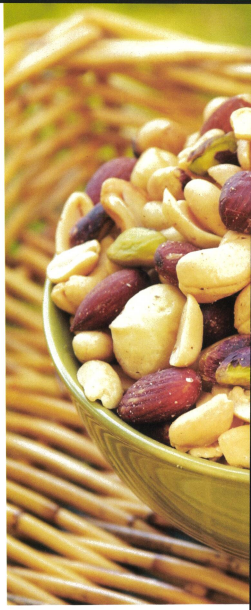
Some of the less commonly known terms are described on the right; if you need more help decoding the jargon, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Dec 03 under 'Sparkling wine'.

You'll also find lots of information about the sparkling wine and champagne-making process there.

- **Aldehydic:** Nutty or sherry-like aroma present in most wines, but too much aldehyde can produce an unpleasant smell or taste.
- **Lifted:** A touch of volatility that can benefit a wine.
- **Malo:** Short for malolactic fermentation, which converts malic into lactic acid and gives the wine extra softness and complexity.
- **Phenolic:** Excessive phenols (from grapeskins and pips) — indicative of a winemaking fault.
- **Reduced:** Too much exposure to air (oxidation) can dull flavour and colour. However, slight oxidation can be beneficial. If a wine hasn't benefited from oxidation, little fruit aroma is left and it's called 'reduced'.
- **Tannin:** A natural preservative derived from grape pips, skins and stalks (as well as wooden casks), which imparts dryness.

Christmas nuts

Some you invite, some invite themselves, and some you bring home with the shopping. Which nuts should make it onto your Christmas list this year?



IN A NUTSHELL

(pardon the pun)

- **Some of the best-liked cashews** *our tasters tried were also among the cheapest — see right for our Best Buys.*
- **Some mixed nuts** *are more mixed than others. Some were well over 60% peanuts, while one had only 8% peanuts for a similar price. The* Mixed nuts *table, far right, has the details.*

There are always plenty of nuts around at Christmas, and when it comes to the ones you put on the table (rather than seat around it), our taste test of cashews revealed some good-value winners.

We asked around 250 of our Home Testers to try 20 brands of cashews, looking for the tastiest. While they didn't quite get top marks for taste, two of the cheaper brands — **COLES FARMLAND Salted cashews** and **WOOLWORTHS Roasted and salted cashews** — still got the thumbs-up from our taste panel. That's good news for stretched Christmas budgets and they're our Best Buys. For how all the brands we could find in Sydney supermarkets and healthfood chains stacked up, see the *Cashew nuts* table, far right.

We also took a look at mixed nuts: which roasted and salted mixed nuts are packed with peanuts, and which ramp up the value with a good proportion of more interesting nuts like cashews, almonds and brazils?

We picked our way through three packets of each brand, separating and weighing the peanuts and beer nuts (which are simply peanuts with the skin left on) and the rest. The table, below right, gives the rundown on where the peanuts were mostly hiding. (We didn't include 'no peanut' varieties.)

If you like peanuts to be included but not the main event, **BELLTREES GOLD LABEL Salted mixed nuts** were outright winners, with only 8% peanuts but still a reasonable price. Three other brands were around half peanuts, but the price per 100 g worked out about the same as, if not more than, for the **BELLTREES**.

The amount of peanuts included in the brands at the bottom of the *Mixed nuts* table made the label 'mixed' a bit notional: **BI-LO Salted mixed nuts** got the wooden spoon with a measly 21% nuts that weren't peanuts. The only consolation — they were also one of the cheapest on test.

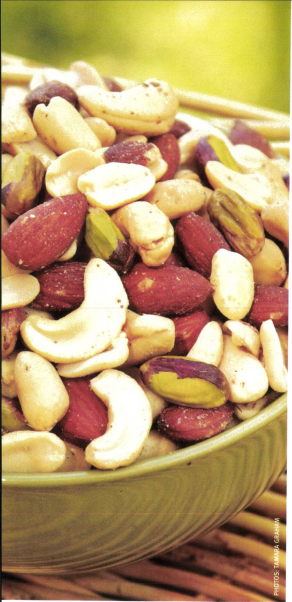
The four top-rated cashews and the Belltrees Gold Label mixed nuts with only 8% peanuts. If you're happy with more peanuts there are several brands that are around 60% peanuts, some of them half the price of the Belltrees (see the table, right).

NUT NUTRITION

If you'll still be counting kilojoules or watching your fat or salt intake over Christmas, picking at the nut bowl every time you go past isn't your best strategy.

Nuts are high in protein, fibre and nutrients like vitamin E. And they're also high in unsaturated 'good' fats, so in all those ways they're good for you. But fat's still fat, so they're high in kilojoules too. A handful of seven or eight cashews (about 22 g), for example, typically contains around 600 kJ and just over two teaspoons of fat.

As for salt, the salted cashews we looked at ranged from a not-far-from-low-salt 149 mg sodium per 100 g of nuts to nearly 1200 mg/100 g, which amounts to a significant amount of sodium even if you restrict yourself to just seven or eight. Check the labels when you're buying if you have to be careful about salt.



PHOTOS: TAMARA GORNIK

CASHEW NUTS

Brand / type (in order of taste score)	1 Score (%)	Sodium (mg / 100 g)	Pack size (g)	Price ($ / 100 g)*
NOBBYS Salted cashews	78	601	150	3.92
COLES Salted cashews	70	510	375	3.20
COLES FARMLAND Salted cashews	65	510	500	1.76
WOOLWORTHS Roasted and salted cashews	60	290	750	1.73
BI-LO Salted cashew nuts	58	290	250	1.76
FORRESTERS Salted cashews (Aldi)	58	183	200	1.50
HOME BRAND Salted cashews	58	290	350	1.71
AMORE Salted cashews	55	160	300	2.00
HEALTHY LIFE Cashew nuts roasted salted	55	149	250	2.44
VALUE PACK (Meriram) Cashews roasted and salted **(A)**	55	1180	750	1.39
NU-VIT Salted cashews	50	1180	200	3.39
BELLTREES GOLD LABEL Salted cashews	48	398	250	1.49
BLACK & GOLD Salted cashews	48	260	150	1.92
NATURE'S SELECTION Salted roasted cashews	48	398	100	1.98
MELLOW YELLOW Salted cashews	45	290	200	2.29
VALUE PACK (Scalzo) Roasted and salted cashews **(A)**	45	393	750	1.73
ECO ORGANICS Roasted cashews	40	290	200	6.48
CHIQUITA NIBBLES Cashews roasted and salted **(B)**	38	290	300	1.83
SANTOS Salted cashews	35	**(C)**	300	2.55
SELECT NATURALS Cashew nuts roasted salted	33	149	250	2.24

* *Prices are typical of those we found in September 2004.*

(A) *Both packs have the name 'Value Pack' but they're a different product packaged by two different companies.*

(B) *This brand is not obviously labelled as Chiquita Nibbles; it comes in a small plastic box with a clear lid — the brand is marked on the bottom.*

(C) *No nutrition information panel and the manufacturer didn't respond to our requests for information. We'll be referring this to the relevant authorities.*

1 Score

Around 250 CHOICE Home Testers each tried four brands of cashew nuts and considered their appearance, taste and texture, giving them a score based on how much they liked them. Thanks to everyone who took part.

MIXED NUTS

Brand / type (in order of % nuts that aren't peanuts)	1 Nuts that aren't peanuts (%)	Peanuts (%)	Nuts included	Price per 100 g ($)*
BELLTREES GOLD LABEL Salted mixed nuts	92	8	Almonds, brazils, cashews, walnuts, hazelnuts, peanuts, macadamias	1.49
AMORE Salted mixed nuts	50	50	Peanuts, cashews, hazelnuts, brazils, almonds, macadamias, walnuts	1.56
SANTOS Salted mixed nuts	48	52	Peanuts, almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazils	1.97
WOOLWORTHS Roasted and salted mixed kernels	48	52	Blanched peanuts, peanuts, almonds, brazils, walnuts, hazelnuts, cashews	1.33
FORRESTERS Salted mixed nuts (Aldi)	42	58	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, brazils, hazelnuts	0.69
HOME BRAND Mixed nuts salted	41	59	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, brazils, hazelnuts	0.69
NATURE'S SELECTION Salted, roasted, mixed nuts	37	63	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, brazils, hazelnuts	0.99
NOBBYS Salted mixed nuts	33	67	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, brazils, hazelnuts	1.40
COLES Salted mixed nuts with green pistachios	32	68	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, pistachios, hazelnuts, macadamias	3.19
COLES FARMLAND Salted mixed nuts	28	72	Peanuts, almonds, cashews, brazils, hazelnuts	1.30
BI-LO Salted mixed nuts **(A)**	21	79 **(A)**	Peanuts, cashews, almonds, hazelnuts, brazils	0.69

* *Prices are typical of those we found in September 2004.*

(A) *Claims 73% peanuts.*

1 Percentage of nuts that aren't peanuts

We bought three packs with the same use-by date from each brand, then separated the peanuts and beer nuts from other nuts by hand and weighed them. Percentages were calculated by weight. Not surprisingly, mixed nuts are a mix of sizes and shapes, which means there's always likely to be batch-to-batch variation — sometimes quite considerable.

Sausage sizzle, anyone?

Looking to splash out on a new gas barbie this summer? Whether you want a large trolley version or a smaller, more portable model, we've got the bases covered.

IN BRIEF

- **The trolley barbecues** *tested are surprisingly complicated and time-consuming to set up — allow up to a day for it or, better still, see if you can get it delivered already assembled. It's worth the money.*
- **The portables are** *pretty hefty to lug around (see* Depends what you mean by portable, *below right), but could be ideal for a balcony or small deck.*

On test were seven metal-trolley barbecues, most with four burners (the **WEBER Genesis** has three), and three single-burner portable models. The trolley barbecues were priced around $1000 (they ranged from $650 to $1300) — the most popular price segment in barbecue land, we're told. Gobsmacked? Many of us were too but, believe it or not, it's possible to spend many thousands on a barbie! (Whether the food tastes barbecued or kitchen-cooked is another matter …) The portables ranged from $270 to $400.

GETTING THEM HOME AND SETTING THEM UP

Transporting and assembling a large trolley barbecue takes a little forethought and planning. For a start, the boxes may not fit in the average car. And they weigh a total of up to 100 kg or so — you might need help lifting some of them.

They're not only big and heavy but complicated to assemble, with lots of pieces that can be awkward to hold or access while bolting them together. The easiest of the trolley models to assemble are the **BEEFEATER** and **WEBER Genesis** — but they still took our experienced technician one-and-a-half to two hours. The **BEEFEATER's** instructions aren't very good, and assembly needs a second person's help.

The remaining models are more difficult and time-consuming to assemble, taking several hours to the best part of a day — and remember, that's an experienced barbecue-putter-togetherer. The worst is the **EVERDURE,** which has dozens of bolts to install, most with very limited access. The **GARTH** needs a second person to hold parts in place while bolts are fitted.

It could be worth paying to have your barbie assembled and delivered by the retailer, if the service is on offer. It might cost you extra, but could be worth it for your sanity!

As for fitting the gas bottle, the **ALFRESCO** is easiest: it has a slide-out holding tray. The others require effort to lift the bottle either into a cabinet or onto a hook.

DEPENDS WHAT YOU MEAN BY PORTABLE

If you're planning to take your portable barbie out for the day, it'll help to have a couple of people to carry it. The **WEBER Baby Q** isn't terribly heavy, but its

WHAT TO BUY

Portable barbecues	
WEBER Baby Q	$269
COLEMAN RoadTrip Sport Grill	$299
Trolley barbecues	
ALFRESCO G4AF	$1095
BEEFEATER 4 Burner Discovery Series ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$651
GRILL MASTER Superior Entertainer 4	$999

awkward shape means it's not easy for one person to carry. The folded-up **COLEMAN** is quite compact but fairly heavy (18 kg, not including the gas bottle), and using the carrying handle is awkward. The **THERMOS**, with its integrated cooler, is very bulky and heavy (and heavier still if the cooler's full); the pull handle is uncomfortable, and while it has wheels, it would require two people to lift it into a car. However, you can separate the barbecue from the cooler.

Overall, you might find these portables cumbersome for a picnic — they're probably better suited to a small balcony setting or camping/caravanning, where you don't have to carry them around and can set them up permanently or for a few days.

The portables need only basic assembly and shouldn't prove a problem for most people, and fitting the gas bottle is also easy (though you need a spanner for the **THERMOS**).

COOKING UP A STORM

All these barbecues have a hood and you cook some things with it open (frying, grilling) and some with it closed (essentially roasting). We cooked sausages and steak with the hood open, and marinated chicken wings and whole roast chicken with it closed. (But we couldn't test a whole roast chicken on the **COLEMAN** and **THERMOS** portables as it doesn't fit under the hood.) The tests measured how well the barbecues cook the food and also how evenly the cooking surface is heated.

Our test is pretty tough, as we don't move the food around the grill plate. Normally if you thought things weren't cooking evenly you'd move them around the plate, or move a piece of food that's cooked before the others to a cooler area so that it doesn't burn. Our test shows clearly which barbecues cook most evenly and we've scored those higher, but by moving food around you can probably improve on our results for all of them.

And with several burners available you can vary the heat anyway rather than rely on moving the food to hot or cooler spots. For single-burner barbecues like the portables, though, you need to compensate for any uneven heating by moving the food around.

The instructions for the **WEBER** barbecues say you should always cook with the hood down. We tried it both up and down for the steak and sausages, and the hood-up results for the **WEBER Baby Q** were a lot better than hood-down, and a little better for the **Genesis**. We used the better (hood-up) scores for our results.

What to look for ...

... IN A BARBECUE

- A large cooking area with half grill and half solid hotplate.
- Hotplates and grills can be made of stainless steel or bare or coated cast iron. Stainless steel is sturdy, heats quickly and resists rust. Bare cast iron is sturdy and sears meat beautifully, but you have to season it constantly with cooking oil to fend off rust. You can also get enamelled or porcelain-coated hotplates and grills, which are rustproof and easy to clean, but the coating can eventually chip.
- Good access to all the cooking area: many hoods can restrict access with their side panels and warming racks. The **GRILL MASTER's** food warmer swings out of the way when the hood is lifted.
- A hood should open up far enough so that it doesn't direct smoke into your face. The **EVERDURE** and **GARTH** rated poorly in this respect.
- All the trolley models on test have a thermometer mounted in the hood, which would be useful if they were accurate — but they weren't. Errors ranged from 10–60°C, averaging around 30–40°C. Once you got used to the measured temperatures that give good results, though, they could be handy, and you can also check them against a better oven thermometer to help.
- Enough space between the handle and the hood so that you don't burn your hand. A handle on the hotplate makes it easier to remove for cleaning.
- The fat tray should be easy to remove and replace and be self-centring so that it catches all the fat.
- Controls should be well labelled, have positive stops at both the low and high position, and be easy to grip and turn. Check you can read them without having to bend over all the time.
- Piezo or battery-operated electronic ignition, activated either by a pressbutton or the gas knob, makes lighting easier. With the **EVERDURE, BEEFEATER** and **WEBER Genesis** models you first have to light a designated burner before any other burners can be lit.
- A double-skin hood that will reduce the external temperature: the double-skinned hoods of the **THERMOS** and **ALFRESCO** reached 80–90°C compared with the 130–190°C of the others.

... IN A TROLLEY

- Side trays are useful for keeping food and other bits and pieces close to hand. However, they got quite hot in places — up to 115°C close to the body of the barbecue — so take care with plastic bags, containers and utensils.
- A side burner may be useful if you want to cook rice, potatoes or wok-fried vegies. On the downside, they take up valuable 'bench' space, especially if you can't cover them, and may not be used often enough to be worthwhile.
- If you intend to move the trolley, even only occasionally, four castors (with brakes) are ideal. If the trolley only has two wheels, make sure it's not too heavy to lift the other end for moving, and check there are no sharp edges where you grip it.
- Wooden trolleys require constant tightening of the bolts; metal ones don't seem to have this problem.
- Stainless steel trolleys are harder to keep looking good. Some metal trolleys (and barbecue parts) may start to rust in some environments (for example, in salt air).
- Trolleys come in different heights — choose one that's comfortable for you.

Profiles

Barbecues in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups.

PORTABLE BARBECUES

WEBER BABY Q

Price: $269

It doesn't come with a stand, so you need something of an appropriate height to put it on if you don't want to cook at ground level. You can buy a matching stand for $100.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good result for marinated chicken wings and steak; good result for sausages.
- Excellent result for roasting a chicken — and it's the only one of the portable barbecues on test that can do this. (The results aren't included in its cooking score so that the portables' scores remain comparable.)
- Good open access to food.
- Very easy to set up.
- Very good controls and the ignition is easy to use.
- Very easy to attach the gas bottle.
- Excellent cooking guide and recipe book.

BAD POINTS

- It's an awkward shape and needs two hands to carry it.
- Fiddly to clean.

PROFILES: TAMARA GRAHAM

Weber Baby Q

COLEMAN ROADTRIP SPORT GRILL

Price: $299

It has a stand, plus side trays if you want to use them.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good result for cooking marinated chicken wings; good result for sausages.
- Very easy to clean.
- Very easy to attach the gas bottle.

BAD POINTS

- Didn't cook steaks quite as well as the other foods.
- Fairly heavy to carry — the handle is large and uncomfortable.
- Ignition is a little fiddly.
- Small knobs with limited finger access; small labelling.

Coleman RoadTrip Sport Grill

TROLLEY BARBECUES

ALFRESCO G4AF

Price: $1095

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent results for steaks, marinated chicken wings and roast chicken; very good at cooking sausages.
- Good open access to food if the warmer is removed.
- Excellent controls and ignition.
- Gas bottle is very easy to fit.
- Lowest gas consumption of the four-burner models.
- Excellent instructions for assembly.
- Double-skin hood keeps external temperature down.

BAD POINTS

- Having two fixed wheels means it's a little difficult to manoeuvre.
- Some crevices to trap grease, and the stainless steel exterior requires extra effort when cleaning.
- The small fat tray needs to be emptied after each use.
- Initial assembly is very involved and time-consuming.

Alfresco G4AF

BEEFEATER 4 BURNER DISCOVERY SERIES

Price: $651 BEST BUY

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cooking scores (except sausages, which were still good).
- Good open access to food if the warmer is removed.
- Clear labelling.
- The large fat tray is easy to remove, and would only need to be emptied occasionally if you put sand in it to absorb dripping fat.
- Not too difficult to assemble, but still takes a couple of hours.

BAD POINTS

- Having two fixed wheels means it's a little difficult to manoeuvre, with no handles and an uncomfortable grip.
- You have to light the right-hand burner first, then light others in order.
- Small finger grip on controls.
- Some crevices to trap grease, and the stainless steel exterior requires extra effort when cleaning.
- Requires some effort to lift the gas bottle onto the hook at the end of the barbecue; fiddly to locate the base of the bottle into grooves.
- Assembly instructions aren't very good.

BeefEater 4 Burner Discovery Series

GRILL MASTER SUPERIOR ENTERTAINER 4

Price: $999

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for cooking marinated chicken wings and roasting a chicken; very good for steak.
- Good open access to food; food warmer swings out of the way.
- Excellent controls and ignition.

BAD POINTS

- Didn't cook sausages quite as well as the other foods.
- Heavy to push; the two fixed wheels can be difficult to manoeuvre.
- Some crevices to trap grease, and the stainless steel exterior requires extra effort when cleaning.
- The small fat tray needs to be emptied after each use.
- Requires some effort to lift the gas bottle onto the hook at the end of the barbecue.
- Very involved and time-consuming to assemble.

Grill Master Superior Entertainer 4

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

PORTABLES

- The **THERMOS** didn't score as well as the other portables for cooking: it was OK for steak and sausages but not very good at marinated chicken wings. It also scored poorly for portability, being very bulky and heavy — the cooler underneath is a nice idea but makes the barbecue harder to move around, especially when it's full.

TROLLEYS

- The **GARTH, TURBO CLASSIC** and **EVERDURE** didn't score as well as the others for cooking, particularly sausages. The **EVERDURE** was the worst, with large areas unevenly cooked and browned in both the sausage and steak tests. These three were also more difficult to clean.
- The **WEBER Genesis** scored well for cooking but was let down by ease of use, in particular ease of cleaning and fitting the gas bottle. Its three-burner design also seems to leave a lot of wasted space.

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	FEATURES Burners	Grills / hotplates supplied	Grill / hotplate material
PORTABLE						
WEBER Baby Q	77	77 **(A)**	78	1	Full-width grill	Porcelain-coated cast iron
COLEMAN RoadTrip Sport Grill	70	68	73	1	Full-width grill **(B)**	Enamelled steel
THERMOS Fire+Ice Grill 2 Go	63	60	67	1	Full-width solid	Teflon-coated alloy
TROLLEY						
ALFRESCO G4AF	87	94	76	4	Half solid, half grill	Enamelled cast iron
BEEFEATER 4 Burner Discovery Series	81	90	68	4	Half solid, half grill	Cast iron
GRILL MASTER Superior Entertainer 4	77	81	72	4	Half solid, half grill	Enamelled cast iron
WEBER Genesis Silver C	76	86 **(A)**	62	3	Full-width grill or half solid / half grill	Vitreous enamelled steel / enamelled cast
TURBO CLASSIC G4TCF	71	73	68	4	Half solid, half grill	Cast iron
GARTH OUTDOOR LEISURE B24 Icon 4	68	73	62	4	Half solid, half grill	Vitreous enamelled cast iron
EVERDURE Norfolk	58	55	62	4	Half solid, half grill	Cast iron

Cooking with gas

The Victorian Office of Gas Safety offers the following tips for checking equipment used with a gas cylinder:

- Replace cylinders if they appear damaged or rusty. Check them for leaks by spraying or brushing a soapy water solution onto them — bubbles will form if gas is escaping. You can also check hose ends and regulator connections this way — it's important to check the whole barbecue/cylinder set-up, not just the cylinder itself.
- Check hoses to make sure they haven't perished. Replace hoses every five years.
- Check connections to make sure they're clean and fit snugly.
- All gas cylinders should be tested every 10 years. You can tell how old your cylinder is by looking at the date stamped on the collar. To get your cylinder tested, look in the gas cylinder testing section of the Yellow Pages.

Other things to bear in mind are:

- Don't store cylinders indoors — including the garage, shed or under the house. Keep them outdoors.
- Always keep LPG cylinders upright — they shouldn't be laid on their side.
- When transporting a cylinder, make sure it's well secured so it can't roll around. Wedge it into the back of your vehicle so it can't move, or tie it up with a strap.
- Don't leave it in the car.

REFILLS

The Office of Gas Safety recommends cylinder exchange systems for gas refills because cylinder safety checks are done at each refill and because the refilling process is generally safer, with well-trained staff under controlled conditions.

SWAP'n'GO is the biggest such scheme and operates in over 4500 outlets around the country. The idea is that you leave an empty cylinder (your own or one of theirs) and take a full one in exchange. When it's empty, you can keep it and refill it yourself or swap it again. Thus you enter the scheme with a cylinder and leave with one, but it's unlikely to be the same one. If you don't already own a cylinder, you can buy a **SWAP'n'GO** one; if you have one but it hasn't been tested and stamped in 10 years, you get a reduced rate on a new **SWAP'n'GO** one.

The empty cylinders are collected from outlets and the company conducts safety checks, cleans them (and, if necessary, paints them), refills them and sends them out again. Old cylinders undergo the standard 10-year recertification test, with a visual inspection for damage inside and outside, and the valve is replaced. Rusty or damaged cylinders are recycled as scrap metal.

Based on prices we saw, it's more expensive than getting your own cylinder refilled: **SWAP'n'GO** charges around $25 for a 9 kg cylinder, but we paid $12–18 for regular refilling. And as more and more refillers change over to that system, it's becoming harder to find places where you can refill your own bottle, which some people are finding annoying. On the other hand, it offers safety benefits missing from the regular refilling process. Service station owners find it handy because they don't need staff filling bottles, and it's quicker for you — you don't have to wait for the refill.

For more information about barbecuing safely, see the the Office of Gas Safety's website: www.ogs.vic.gov.au/facts/bbq.html.

CANCER RISK?

There's some evidence that burning or charring meat creates chemicals that have been linked to cancer in animals. However, it's thought that the amount consumed in the average Australian diet is too low to be considered a significant cancer risk. If you want to play it safe, don't overcook the surface of the meat and don't eat burnt or charred bits.

				SPECIFICATIONS				
ition type	Side burner	Cupboard in trolley	Rotisserie	Gas consumption (g / hr)	Dimensions (W x D x H, cm)*	Warranty (years)**	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)†
to		na		190	68 x 40 x 36	5	Weber	269
to		na		220	137 x 46 x 87 **(G)**	'Limited lifetime' **(H)**	Coleman Brands	299
to		na **(F)**		200	116 x 42 x 92 **(G)**	1–3	Salton	399 **(J)**
ctronic **(C)**	✓	✓		820	167 x 58 x 124	3–10	Barbeques Galore	1095
to				1200	144 x 64 x 114	1–2	BeefEater Barbecues	651
ctronic **(D)**	✓	✓		1200	175 x 65 x 113	1–2	Focus Lifestyle Products	999 **(J)**
to	✓		**(E)**	730	164 x 60 x 109	3–25	Weber	1099
to	**(E)**	✓	**(E)**	1200	164 x 61 x 114	2–10	Barbeques Galore	999
ctronic **(C)**	✓	✓	✓	1060	187 x 59 x 118	1	Bunnings	1299 **(J)**
ctronic **(C)**	✓	✓		1120	159 x 62 x 123	1–5	Shriro	999

* *When the barbecue is fully set up, ready to cook.*

** *Different parts (burners, frame, valves, hood, plate, etc) have different warranties.*

† *Recommended retail, based on information provided by manufacturers in October 2004, unless noted otherwise.*

na *Not applicable — no trolley, though the Coleman and Thermos have a stand. The Weber needs a table or other support if you don't want to use it on the ground; you can buy a matching stand for $100.*

(A) *This was the cooking score when steak and sausages were cooked with the hood up. When cooked with the hood down, as recommended in the instructions, the score was lower.*

(B) *With a small solid section in the centre.*

(C) *Battery-operated.*

(D) *Battery-operated electronic ignition for barbecue, piezo for side burner.*

(E) *Optional extra.*

(F) *No cupboard, but has a cooler below the barbecue.*

(G) *These are the unfolded dimensions, ready to cook, with the lid down and the side trays attached; the folded dimensions are 78 x 46 x 27 cm and 84 x 42 x 66 respectively.*

(H) *A 'lifetime' warranty tends to mean little more than that the product is guaranteed to last as long as it lasts; 'limited lifetime' is even more obscure.*

(J) *The price we paid in August/September 2004.*

1 Overall score

- Cooking score: 60%
- Ease of use score: 40%

2 Cooking score

This score is based on the results for cooking:

- Steak.
- Sausages.
- Marinated chicken wings.
- Whole roast chicken (trolley barbecues only).

All were weighted equally. See *Cooking up a storm*, page 23, for more on the cooking tests.

3 Ease of use score

The following ease of use factors were weighted equally:

- Ease of cooking (access to food, etc).
- Mobility/portability.
- Using the controls.
- Cleaning.
- Fitting the gas bottle.
- Setting up (portable models only; while it's very difficult to set the trolley models up, you only have to do it once).

LITE WEGMANN

Tips for the perfect steak

Fiona, CHOICE's home economist who runs all our cooking tests, gives the following tips for cooking the perfect steak on the barbie.

Preparing the barbie

- Preheat the barbecue on medium heat until it's just starting to smoke — approximately 10 minutes.

Preparing the meat

- Removing excess fat from steak will reduce flare-ups.
- Season just before cooking. If the meat is seasoned too early the salt will draw the moisture from it and ruin its flavour and texture.
- Steaks can be brushed with oil.

Cooking

- Turn the steak only once during cooking, as it will quickly dry out if it's continually turned. Turn once the bottom of the first side is well browned.
- The time it takes to cook will vary depending on the thickness and cut of the steak and how you like it done. Try to gauge this by prodding the steak with your finger rather than piercing with a fork or knife, which will allow the juices to escape. Rare steak will have more 'give' than well-done steak — with experience you'll be able to tell just how well it's done.

Resting

- Once the steak is cooked, put it in a warm spot close to the barbecue to rest before serving, to maximise juiciness and flavour — about 5–10 minutes.

SWEET WARNING

If you have an intolerance to fructose – a naturally occurring fruit sugar that's also made artificially for use as a sweetener in foods and drinks – you now need to be even more vigilant when reading food labels.

Tagatose, a new ingredient recently approved for use as a lower-kilojoule substitute for sugar, is metabolised in the same way as fructose. So fructose-intolerant people may react to tagatose in the same way, suffering from low blood sugar, severe abdominal symptoms, and eventually jaundice and liver damage if they keep on eating it.

Foods you might find tagatose in include breakfast cereals, diet soft drinks, low-fat/fat-free ice cream and frozen dairy desserts, diet/health bars and chewing gum.

While only a very small percentage of people are fructose-intolerant, the message from the national food regulator, FSANZ, is an important one: people who are fructose-intolerant should also avoid tagatose by checking the ingredients list.

TAMARA GRAHAM

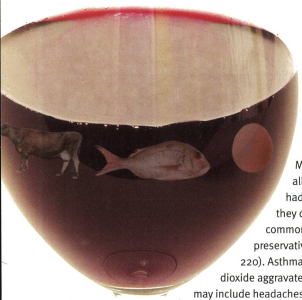
LETTUCE BE SAFE

Who'd have thought the source of a food poisoning outbreak could be the seemingly innocuous lettuce?

That's what health chiefs found on investigating 144 cases of salmonella poisoning in the UK earlier this year. It seems that people got sick after eating contaminated lettuce from fast-food outlets, where it hadn't been stored or handled correctly.

If you don't want the same thing to happen to you, avoid eating lettuce from fast-food outlets if it looks as though it's been left lying around on display in too high temperatures – it could be contaminated. And at home, wash and drain lettuce before eating it, and don't leave it out in a warm environment for any length of time.

Don't wash lettuce before you store it, though, as dry leaves keep better than wet ones.



UTE WEISMANN/JACQUI FRY

Waiter, there's fish in my wine!

Many people who suffer from allergies or asthma have long had to be careful about which wine they drink, as they react to certain commonly added ingredients, such as the preservative sulphur dioxide (preservative 220). Asthma sufferers may find that sulphur dioxide aggravates their condition; other reactions may include headaches or hives. But it's easy enough to avoid, as you can check the label to see if it's listed.

What's less widely known is that proteins from other common allergens — eggs, milk and fish — are also sometimes used in the winemaking process, and until now they haven't had to be labelled.

The albumen in egg whites, casein in milk and collagen from certain fish are used as fining agents, to help strip the phenolics – substances that can give wine a bitter taste – from wine. While they're largely removed by filtration, very small residual amounts may still be in the final product. In addition, tannin from the skin of chestnuts is also sometimes used as a wine additive.

But from December 20 this year, derivatives of egg, fish, milk and nuts, when present, must be declared on bottled wine labelled with a vintage date of 2003 or later, and on all other alcoholic beverages. This is good news for people sensitive to these allergens, who until now may have been mistaking allergic reactions for hangovers!

GETTY IMAGES NF

Slap it on

Painting a room or two this summer? Our interior paint buying guide will help.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Our test covered widely available white low-sheen acrylic paints** *and found that, generally speaking, cheap paints don't cover quite as well — so if you're painting over a dark colour with one, you may be up for an extra coat (see the table, page 31, for scores).*
- **Acrylic paints like these contain solvents** *that can be harmful to health, but the risk to the occasional home painter is very small, especially if you keep the room well ventilated while you're painting and for a while afterwards (see* Is paint harmful?, *page 30).*

The colour is up to you, but how do you pick a quality interior paint that'll cover in as few coats as possible and be easy to clean and keep looking good? Do you use price as a guide or do you just buy whatever brand the shop has? To make the choice less hit-and-miss we tested all the widely available white low-sheen acrylic interior paints on the market.

Our market research indicated that low-sheen finishes are most popular for lounge and dining areas. And according to the paint industry there are three 'price points' — cheapies at the bottom end of the market, an in-the-middle range and premium-quality paints — and most brands have a paint in each segment. We tested paints from all three price points to see if more dollars really equal better performance.

OUR TEST

Most interior paint sold in Australia ends up on walls that are already painted. So a key performance criterion is how well the paint covers what's underneath. Other major considerations are how well the paint will stand up to repeated washing and how stain-resistant it is.

A specialised paint lab tested the covering ability (hiding power) and wash resistance of the paints to the Australian standard, while the CHOICE lab did stain resistance tests using a set of stains that might easily end up on your newly painted walls thanks to clumsy adults or creative kids.

IT'S A COVER-UP

To find paints that cover best, they were painted onto test panels marked with a heavy black ink pattern. The degree of show-through of the black ink after two coats of each paint (applied at the manufacturer's recommended coverage rate) indicates its hiding power. At the extremes of hiding power, it could make the difference between needing two coats or three.

And it was the cheapest paints that tended not to cover as well, meaning you may need to use an extra coat to cover a dark colour. On the other hand, paying more doesn't guarantee a paint with good hiding power (see the table, page 31, for scores and comparative costs).

The paint with the best hiding power is **BIO Wall Paint Interior HD**. However, one factor that contributes to its strong performance is that it makes an unusually modest coverage rate claim (8–10 square metres per litre compared to a more common 14–16 m^2/L). Perhaps not surprisingly, using more of it to cover the same area as other paints means it covers better. And, of course, it also increases the cost of using it.

BIO's main selling point in fact isn't its hiding power, but rather its claimed health and environmental credentials — in particular, it doesn't contain any volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which may make it attractive for people who are sensitive to normal paint fumes or have any respiratory problems. See *Is paint harmful?*, page 30, for more on this.

WHAT TO BUY

	Price per 4 L can
NEW LOOK Low Sheen Acrylic	$53.70
HOME Premium Quality Low Sheen Acrylic	$49.05
BIO Wall Paint Interior HD	$63.70
BRISTOL Easy Living Interior Acrylic Low Sheen	$58.50
Good stain resistance	
DURALEX Everclean Low Sheen Acrylic	$51.45
DULUX Wash & Wear 101 Low Sheen	$59.20
WATTYL ID Ultra Premium Low Sheen Interior	$58.95

See the table for comparative costs for painting 10 m² at the manufacturer's recommended coverage rate.

NEW LOOK, HOME Premium Quality and **BRISTOL Easy Living Interior** have almost as good hiding power as the **BIO** paint but better stain removal performance. If you think you can trust your household not to leave marks on your walls, the **BIO** is worth considering particularly if you're sensitive to paint fumes, as it doesn't contain VOCs (see *Is paint harmful?*, below) — but it will cost you more than most other paints and may be harder to find (see footnote (A), far right).

The other three paints listed above don't have quite such good hiding power as these four but have excellent stain resistance — they'd be a good choice for high-traffic areas prone to marks and stains.

TOP JOB

Here's a brief guide to DIY interior paint success:

- Preparation is key — make sure the surface you're going to paint is free from paint flakes, dust and greasy spots. Use a sugar soap solution to clean walls prior to painting and consider whether you need to sand back to a smooth finish.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions on the paint can.
- Before opening a can of paint, dust around the rim in case there's any dust and debris that could fall into the paint.
- Give the paint a good stir using a wooden paddle.
- Start with the ceiling and work from top to bottom of walls so that you don't splash areas you've already painted.
- Avoid painting in extreme heat or cold — both can negatively affect the paint job.
- Don't pour leftover paint down the drain — save some for any later touch-ups, and ask your local council for disposal guidelines.
- Don't rinse your brushes and rollers under a running tap straight down the drain, either. With these interior acrylic paints, wipe off as much paint as you can with newspaper and soak them in a little water before a final rinse.

LITE WEISMANN

The best (Bio, right) and one of the worst (Spring Design) paints for hiding power after two coats — you'd probably need another coat over dark colours with the Spring Design and other paints with a similar score.

Is paint harmful?

Paints are a complex mixture of chemicals, some potentially harmful. Keeping the paint components 'wet' (in solution) are solvents — usually a type known as VOCs (volatile organic compounds). The acrylic paints we tested are typically around 6–8% VOCs — a level that our expert lab says compares favourably to acrylic low-sheen paints around the world.

Excessive exposure to VOCs can lead to 'painter's syndrome', which is characterised by dizziness, nausea and headaches. VOCs are readily absorbed through the skin, lungs and stomach. They can affect the central nervous system and have been linked to skin conditions and diseases of the lung, liver and reproductive system. A recent study even linked VOCs to the development of asthma in children.

The good news is that exposure to these chemicals is thought to present only a very small risk to the occasional painter — ensuring good ventilation while painting is the key to minimising it. And paint manufacturers continue to lower the levels of VOCs in paints as paint technology improves.

However, if you have respiratory problems or you're particularly sensitive to paint fumes, you might find a paint that contains no VOCs a good option. The **BIO** paint tested is the only example we found.

There's also a potential environmental benefit of using a paint that doesn't contain VOCs, as they're known contributors to photochemical smog and affect indoor air quality.

Brand / name (low-sheen acrylic, in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Hiding power score (%)	3 Stain resistance score (%)	SPECIFICATIONS Recommended coverage rate (m^2 / L)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (4 L can, $)*	5 Cost / 10 m^2 coverage ($)**
NEW LOOK	89	88	90	14	Paint Place Stores	53.70	9.60
HOME Premium Quality	87	86	90	14	Home Timber & Hardware	49.05	8.75
BIO Wall Paint Interior HD **(A)**	82 **(A)**	90 **(A)**	55	8–10 **(A)**	Bio Products **(A)**	63.70	15.90
BRISTOL Easy Living Interior	81	83	75	16	Barloworld Coatings	58.50	9.15
DURALEX Everclean	80	73	100	16	Duralex Paints	51.45	8.05
DULUX Wash & Wear 101	79	72	100	16	Orica	59.20	9.25
WATTYL ID Ultra Premium Interior	79	72	100	16	Wattyl Australia	58.95	9.20
DURALEX Premium Quality **(B)**	78 **(B)**	85 **(B)**	55	12–16 **(B)**	Duralex Paints	45.60	7.15
BERGER Everlast	76	81	60	16	Orica	53.60	8.40
COLOURS OF AUSTRALIA Easycare **(C)**	76	81	60	16	PaintRight **(C)**	45.45	7.10
TAUBMANS Easycoat	75	85	45	16	Barloworld Coatings	52.40	8.20
TAUBMANS Living Proof Silk	75	66	100	16	Barloworld Coatings	56.70	8.85
WATTYL IMPRESSIONS	75	83	50	14	Big W	41.95	7.50
ACCENT Interior	74	68	90	16	Mitre 10	48.45	7.55
TAUBMANS Duraclean	74	65	100	16	Barloworld Coatings	57.80	9.05
BRITISH PAINTS In Colour Interior	72	81	45	14	Orica	46.55	8.30
DULUX Designer Silk	72	62	100	16	Orica	63.60	9.95
THE PRICE BRAND Interior	72	62	100	14	KMart	27.60	4.90
DURALEX Professional Yellow Label	71	81	40	16	Duralex Paints	35.15	5.50
WATTYL Aspects Interior	69	70	65	14	Wattyl Australia	42.45 **(E)**	5.05
PERFORMER Interior	68	57	100	14	KMart	40.00	7.15
SPRING DESIGN	68	57	100	16	Mitre 10	35.25 **(E)**	3.70
WALPAMUR Interior **(D)**	68 **(D)**	57 **(D)**	100	14–16 **(D)**	Orica	41.65	6.50
WATTYL Pascol Washable Interior Low Lustre	67	58	95	16	Wattyl Australia	50.95	7.95
DIMENSIONS Silk Glow Washable	66	68	60	16	3D Paint Stores	49.95	7.80
STYLE	66	69	55	16	Big W	41.95 **(E)**	4.35
FLAIR by WATTYL Vinyl	63	71	40	14	Big W	30.45 **(E)**	3.60

* *Average price found in a store survey in October 2004.*

** *At the maximum recommended coverage rate, based on the average price for a can, rounded to the nearest five cents.*

(A) *When tested at its lower claimed coverage rate of 8 m^2/L, this paint scored 88% overall and 99% for hiding power. Phone 1800 809 448 freecall or go to www.bioproducts.com.au to find your closest supplier.*

(B) *When tested at its lower claimed coverage rate of 12 m^2/L, this paint scored 80% overall and 88% for hiding power.*

(C) *Available from PaintRight, a chain of shops operating in all states except the NT and WA.*

(D) *When tested at its lower claimed coverage rate of 14 m^2/L, this paint scored 77% overall and 69% for hiding power.*

(E) *6 L can.*

1 Overall score

- Hiding power: 75%
- Stain resistance: 25%

We also conducted a 'resistance to washing' test according to the Australian standard — you want to be able to wash your walls and scrub away stains without rubbing the paint off at the same time. It's a fairly tough test in which paints are applied to test panels and subjected to 200 repetitive wash cycles with a sponge and soapy water. All the paints passed this test, so we didn't include it in the overall score.

However, a potential side effect of scrubbing or repeated washing is that the paint might develop a noticeable glossy spot. We measured gloss levels before and after the washability test and only one paint, **DURALEX Professional Yellow Label**, suffered from this.

2 Hiding power score

See *It's a cover-up*, page 29, for a description of the Australian standard relative hiding power test. It produces results more sensitive than the human eye — differences of 7–8% are visible. When a range was given for a paint's coverage rate per m^2 we tested both extremes but ranked the paint on its higher (and therefore cheaper) coverage claim.

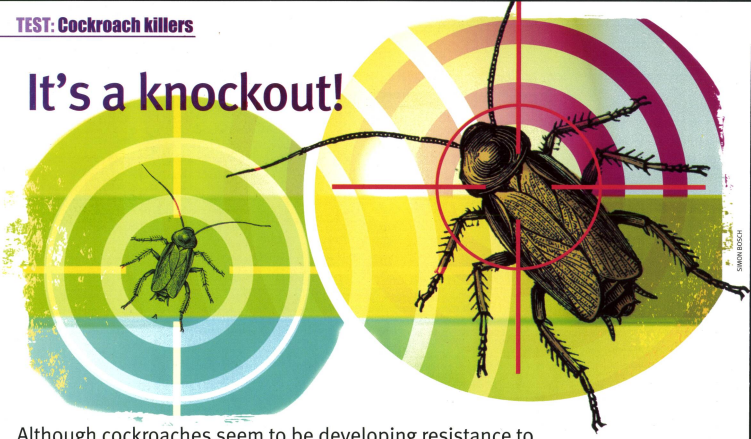
3 Stain resistance score

We used red wine, tomato sauce, raspberry cordial and various coloured-ink pens to mark the paints, and rated them for how easy it was to remove the stains. First we used just water; if the stain still showed we used a mild solution of washing-up liquid; and if that failed to shift it we resorted to a spray-on kitchen cleaner (as recommended by several of the manufacturers). The final score only takes into account how much of the stain could be removed, not which method was required to do it.

There was no difficulty removing the cordial and tomato sauce stains from any paint. However, red wine and ink proved more challenging. In particular, paints with a score under 60% for stain removal had lots of trouble with red wine.

TAMARA GRAHAM

It's a knockout!



SIMON BOSCH

Although cockroaches seem to be developing resistance to certain insecticides, we still found some products that land a knockout blow.

IN A NUTSHELL

We found some *cockroach sprays, bombs, baits and mats that work — the best type of product for you depends on the kind of cockroach problem you have.*

While some insecticides *work, don't just spray them around willy-nilly. They're reasonably toxic chemicals and should be used with care as part of an integrated approach to getting rid of cockroaches.*

They crawl around at night and hide by day. Their diet and table manners are generally offensive. You don't like them, and they don't like you much either. We're talking about one of Australia's most unwanted house guests — the dreaded cockroach.

The two most common are the German and American species. The German is the smaller and more numerous home invader, while the American is larger and is comfortable inside and outside your home, depending on the climate.

UNHEALTHY AS WELL AS UNPLEASANT?

If a cockroach problem gets out of hand, besides the general unpleasantness you could be facing a health hazard.

Cockroaches are thought capable of spreading a variety of disease-causing bugs such as salmonella. Not only that, but cockroach faeces and saliva contain allergens that have been linked to the development of asthma in children.

So if cockroach numbers are increasing in your home, action is needed. But what to do? Experts say the best way to deal with cockroach infestations is to adopt an 'integrated' approach — the judicious use of insecticides combined with good hygiene and knowledge of cockroach habits.

To help you with the insecticide element of roach control we tested all the basic cockroach sprays, bombs, baits and mats on the Australian market that weren't about to be reformulated (see notes 2 and 3 on page 34 for details of how we tested).

We'd have liked to include products formulated around 'egg stopper' or insect growth regulators as their main active ingredient/s too, but that takes longer and we couldn't do it in the time available for testing and still bring you the results in time for summer.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

The conventional wisdom is that if you have a heavy infestation, a bomb is what you need — they're the best at getting into cracks and crevices where cockroaches live and breed.

Baits and mats are generally not thought to be as effective as bombs on a large scale, but they can certainly prevent a small infestation from escalating. Sprays aren't very practical for tackling a large infestation either, but can give a wider coverage than baits. However, baits have the advantage of the poison being contained in the bait and not left lingering on any surface where crawling babies or pets could lick it.

So if you've only seen a few cockies, try a bait, mat or spray. These also make good follow-up choices if you decide you have to use a bomb first.

BAITS AND MATS

The idea of baits is that the cockies are tempted by something attractive in them to come and snack, and

the poison kills them. **MORTEIN Lure 'n' Kill** proved the most effective of the baits both immediately and long-term.

However, the best performer in this group was the **DEAD END** mat, mainly because it works faster than the baits (see the table on page 34). It's literally a cardboard mat (about 25 x 40 cm) that you slide under things like the microwave or fridge or onto cupboard shelves (not where you keep food or crockery/cutlery). When cockroaches walk on it they pick up the poison on their feet. It's also designed to be separated into four smaller pieces if required (see the photo, below right). Unfortunately it's only available in parts of the country — see *What to buy* for details.

THE BEST SPRAYS

While most sprays were able to knock roaches down fast when sprayed directly onto them, only some lived up to their promise of long-term protection (most surface sprays promise three to six months).

The best — **BAYGON Advanced High Performance**, **MORTEIN High Performance, RAID Protector** and **ATLAS Crawling Insect** — all contain the insecticide cypermethrin, with all but the **RAID** containing imiprothrin as well. These insecticides are fourth-generation synthetic pyrethroids (a class of chemicals based on the naturally occurring insecticide pyrethrum).

The not-so-hot sprays generally had older second and third-generation pyrethroid insecticides (permethrin and tetramethrin) in their formulations, to which the roaches might have developed some resistance. See *Handle with care*, page 35, for more on this.

DOWN FOR THE COUNT?

In our last cockroach killers test all the bomb products performed similarly, and all were still highly effective after three months, so we advised buying on price.

This time, however, it's a different story. While all the bombs knock down and kill roaches, only one — **MORTEIN Roach Bomb** — looked like coming close to living up to its claim of "3 months protection". (**BAYGON DIY Pest Control** and **MORTEIN Do-it-Yourself Control** bombs don't make a three-month protection claim against cockroaches).

Continued on page 35

Good hygiene and cockie habits

Factoring these in is essential for reducing cockroach plagues and maximising the effectiveness of insecticides.

- Don't leave the dishes till the morning — food scraps left lying around overnight are a cockie's midnight feast. If you're not going to wash them, at least scrape and rinse them free of scraps.
- Store food in tightly sealed containers and clean up any spills or crumbs immediately.
- Cockroaches also need access to water, so wipe up spills immediately.
- Make your rubbish hard to get at: keep organic waste in tightly covered garbage cans and put rubbish out at night.
- Don't leave pets' food dishes out overnight.
- Cockroaches prefer environments that are warm, dark and moist. They also like confined, close spaces, so clear up potential breeding grounds like old piles of rubbish, and don't store old newspapers or cardboard around the home. Seal cracks and crevices where cockroaches live and breed.

WHAT TO BUY

BAITS AND MATS

DEAD END mats	$12.50 (two packs of six mats)*
MORTEIN Lure 'n' Kill cockroach baits	$3.35 (pack of 6 baits)

* *Available only in Action stores in northern NSW, Queensland and WA; order via www.deadendcockroachmats.com or contact the manufacturer on (02) 9521 8961.*

SURFACE SPRAYS

BAYGON Advanced High Performance	$6.98 (250 g can)
MORTEIN High Performance	$7.52 (250 g can)
ATLAS Crawling Insect BEST BUY	$1.99 (250 g can)

While the **ATLAS** spray has the fastest knockdown effect, it isn't as effective long-term as the other two sprays, but its price makes it definitely worth considering. It's only available in Aldi supermarkets, which are in the ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

BOMBS

MORTEIN Roach Bomb	$9.99 (2 x 150 g cans)

TAMARA GRAHAM

Brand / product (in rank order within types)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 First assessment score (%)	3 Long-term kill rate: after 3 months (%)	SPECIFICATIONS Active ingredients	Manufacturer / distributor	Pack teste
BAITS AND MATS						
DEAD END Mats **(A)**	95	85	100	0.1 g cypermethrin/mat	Dead End Mats **(A)**	20 **(A**
MORTEIN Lure 'n' Kill	88	63	100	5 g/kg chlorpyrifos	Reckitt Benckiser	6
MORTEIN Nest Kill	79	42	97	5 g/kg chlorpyrifos	Reckitt Benckiser	12
BAYGON Cockroach Stopper	49	3	72	5 g/kg chlorpyrifos	S C Johnson	12
RAID Protector MaxKill	39	13	52	5 g/kg chlorpyrifos	S C Johnson	6
SURFACE SPRAYS						
BAYGON Advanced High Performance	90	88	92	0.7 g/kg imiprothrin, 2 g/kg cypermethrin	S C Johnson	250
MORTEIN High Performace	88	89	87	0.7 g/kg imiprothrin, 2 g/kg cypermethrin	Reckitt Benckiser	250
ATLAS Crawling Insect	79	90	67	0.7 g/kg imiprothrin, 2 g/kg cypermethrin	Aldi **(B)**	250
RAID Protector	78	79	77	2.0 g/kg cypermethrin, 3.5 g/kg tetramethrin, 3 g/kg s-hydroprene	S C Johnson	250
HOME BRAND Odourless	58	84	32	2.79 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 1.38 g/kg tetramethrin 20:80	Woolworths	250
MORTEIN Odourless	53	85	20	2.79 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 0.15 g/kg imiprothrin 20:80	Reckitt Benckiser	250
BLACK & GOLD Low Irritant	48	53	42	2.79 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 1.38 g/kg tetramethrin 20:80	Metcash Trading	250
PEA BEU	48	84	12	2.79 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 1.38 g/kg tetramethrin 20:80	Reckitt Benckiser	250
BOMBS						
MORTEIN Roach Bomb	90	100	80	10 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 6 g/kg fenoxycarb	Reckitt Benckiser	2 x 1
BAYGON DIY Pest Control	74	98	50	3 g/kg pyrethrum, 0.4 g/kg cyfluthrin, 10 g/kg piperonyl butoxide	S C Johnson	3 x 1
MORTEIN Do-it-Yourself Control	71	99	42	10 g/kg permethrin 25:75, 0.77 g/kg fenoxycarb	Reckitt Benckiser	3 x 1
RAID Protector Exterminator	68	100	35	10 g/kg permethrin 25:75	S C Johnson	3 x 1
TRAPS						
LO LINE Cockroach trap	57	57	na	Food-based attractant	Entosol	10
Readers' red wine trap	3	3	na	Red wine	na	na

* *Prices are those we paid in March to June 2004.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *Available only in Action supermarkets in northern NSW, Queensland and WA; order from www.deadendcockroachmats.com or contact the manufacturer on (02) 9521 8961. The price is for two packs of six mats by post (including postage); the pack size has changed since our test.*

(B) *There are Aldi supermarkets in the ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria.*

1 Overall score

Baits and mats: The first assessment score makes up one third, and the three-month kill rate two thirds, of the overall score, because they're intended more for long-term protection than immediate knockdown effect.

Sprays and bombs: The average of the first assessment score and the kill rate at three months.

Traps: The first assessment score only — they don't claim long-term protection.

2 First assessment score

Baits and mats: This is the average kill rate 24 hours after we first put German and American cockies into the test chamber. The roomy chambers contained supplies of food and water, so the roaches weren't forced to nibble the baits. There was also a bait-free area, so the roaches could even avoid them. We repeated the test three times and averaged the results.

Sprays: The first assessment score is based on how fast the spray works to put roaches on their backs ('knockdown'). We put German and American roaches in specially designed chambers, sprayed them once from a distance of 20 cm and timed how long it took to knock down 100% of them. We converted the average time from three tests into a score.

Bombs: Also a knockdown assessment. We put cages of German and American cockroaches in a mock kitchen, complete with a kitchen cupboard. We activated the bombs, waited two hours and counted the number of casualties (average % knockdown in two different tests is shown).

Traps: This is the cumulative number of German and American cockroaches caught in a mock kitchen chamber over a period of one week. The average percentage of roaches trapped in two different tests is shown.

3 Long-term kill rate

Baits and mats: After the 24-hour assessment we removed any surviving roaches and left the baits/mat in the chambers for three months. After three months we added new roaches to the chambers and checked on the survivors after 14 days. The figure shown is the average of the German and American roaches killed in three separate tests.

Sprays and bombs: For the sprays we sprayed pieces of untreated pine (simulating cupboard shelves) from a distance of 20 cm. For the bombs we exposed untreated pine panels in a mock kitchen while the bombs were activated. We stored these panels for three months and then exposed German and American cockroaches to the surfaces, waiting 48 hours before doing a body count. Shown is the average percentage of German and American roaches killed in three separate tests.

From page 33

Again, our expert lab thought insecticide resistance might be a factor in the lower long-term protective performance of the bombs tested this time: most of their active ingredients are older second and third-generation synthetic pyrethroids.

TRAPPING, DROWNING ...

So some of the chemicals work, but what if you'd rather not use them to rid your home of cockies? Alternatives are sticky traps or any of a number of sworn-by home remedies.

However, experts say traps are best used as indicators of cockroach problems rather than as control measures. They can help locate roach hiding places and indicate the severity of infestation, and so help you decide which chemical measures to use and where to target them.

We tested the only traps we could find, **LO-LINE**, in a mock kitchen set-up complete with mock cupboards, and they were able to trap just over half the roaches in one week. Given how fast cockroaches breed and their numbers, we tend to agree with the experts — we don't think most people would be satisfied with this as the only control measure.

When we asked CHOICE subscribers

SIMON BOSCH

to send us their favourite environmentally friendly method of dispatching cockroaches, quite a few sang the praises of the red-wine trap, so we put it to the test too. This trap consists of a dash of red wine in a margarine container with a smear of margarine at the top to stop the cockies crawling out. Unfortunately our cockies must have been of the teetotal persuasion — only 3% ended up in the drink.

Thanks to all our readers who sent in their stories and recommendations. ■

Handle with care

SUPER ROACHES?

When we last tested cockroach killers (CHOICE, December 1999) we found that sprays containing the same second and third-generation pyrethroid insecticides as some products in this test did much better at the three-month mark. So why have these active ingredients largely lost their long-term effectiveness?

According to our expert lab, a likely explanation is that the cockroaches have developed resistance to the older second and third-generation pyrethroid insecticides.

The development of insecticide resistance in the German species is well documented. In fact, chlordane-resistant German roaches were identified as far back as the early 1950s, and resistance to all major groups of insecticides has now been reported in various roach populations around the world.

Other insects, such as malaria-carrying mosquitos, have also developed resistance to various insecticides.

And they're not the only examples of resistant bugs posing a threat to humans or valuable crops. Experts caution that the responsible use of insecticides is an important factor in controlling the development of insecticide resistance.

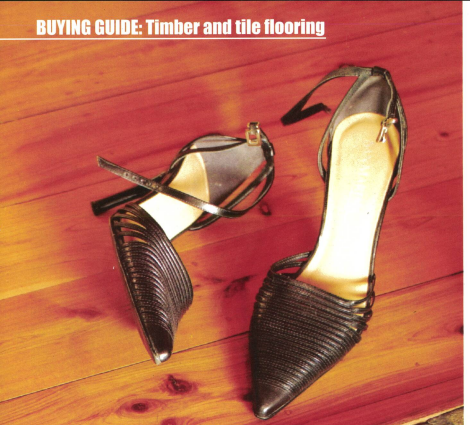
For cockroaches, this means the integrated approach — not overusing insecticides and also taking into account good hygiene and cockroach habits (see page 33).

TOXIC SHOCK?

All the products we tested (except the **LO LINE Cockroach Trap**) contain potentially harmful chemicals. Handle baits and mats carefully and avoid breathing in the fumes from sprays and bombs. Wash your hands after using them.

The major active ingredients have these toxicity profiles:

- **Synthetic pyrethroids:** These generally end in 'thrin' (such as permethrin and cypermethrin). As a chemical class they're extremely toxic to bees and fish but are considered to have relatively low to moderate toxicity to humans. Environmentally, pyrethroids are believed to break down relatively easily into less toxic compounds.
- Chlorpyrifos, found in all the baits, is an **organophosphate** insecticide. While it's thought to be only moderately toxic to humans, it's moderately to very highly toxic to birds and bees and is highly toxic to fish. Environmentally, it's moderately persistent in soils, with a half-life usually between two and four months.



FLOORED FOR CHOICE ...

Choosing flooring is an important part of home building or renovation — what are your options?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Timber and tiles** *are popular non-allergenic flooring options, but think about the use of the floor when deciding.*
- **If you're concerned** *about the logging of old-growth forests, choose a product certified as originating from sustainably managed plantations, or use recycled timber.*
- **Floating timber floors** *are popular — what exactly are they?*

When you're building or renovating, elegant flooring that's also practical can add substantial value to your home, in addition to looking and feeling great. Because flooring has a major influence on the feel and mood of a room, it's important to make the right choice. You've also got to consider how much traffic it'll get and factor in maintenance and durability, as well as appearance, comfort and cost.

To help guide you through the choices, we've surveyed what's available in timber and tile flooring. We haven't included carpet because the range of options is so large that it's an article in itself.

Living areas

In rooms where family and friends gather, the aim is usually to combine good looks with practicality. Timber or carpet tend to be the main options.

Kitchens and bathrooms

Kitchen floors, in particular, need to be both spill- and busy-proof — generally, hard flooring like tile, stone and timber is a good choice. For bathrooms, though, tiles need to be non-slip and timber properly waterproofed.

Some softer floorings, such as cork, vinyl or even rubber, can work in these areas too. See *Other options*, page 38, for more on these.

TALL TIMBER

Timber floors have very wide appeal, particularly in living areas — they're also a strong home selling point.

Timber flooring is available in a wide variety of types, styles and wood species. You can choose between solid plank styles that slot together, parquetry designs and relatively new floating floors that can be overlaid on pre-existing solid floors (see right).

Advantages of timber include:

- High durability: well-sealed timber is spill, stain and chemical-resistant.
- Comfort.
- Easy care.
- It's relatively low-allergenic. Timber and other solid floors like tile are recommended if a member of the family suffers from allergies or asthma.

On the downside:

- Unsealed timber flooring can stain, dent and scratch easily — it's not a very practical option for homes.
- High traffic areas will need stripping and sanding every three to four years (not only to keep it looking good, but also to maintain its moisture resistance, which is important in preventing warping or other problems).

TIMBER FLOOR TYPES

There are two main types of timber floor: structural (traditional timber boards laid on bearers or joists) and so-called floating floors.

Boards of structural flooring typically come in 100 and 150 mm widths and are generally available in various click-together tongue and groove designs.

Professional installation is generally recommended for structural floors, but it can be a time-consuming process — a period of up to two weeks may be required before laying so that the moisture content of the timber boards has time to acclimatise to the intended environment. And it's important to ensure there's adequate subfloor ventilation to prevent warping of the timber.

Structural timber typically varies in cost depending on grade, thickness and species. Generally, three grades are available:

- The cheapest (around $40/m²) has more knots, grain and natural variation ...
- ... than 'standard' or mid-grade timber ($50–$70/m²).
- The most expensive grade ($60–$100/m²) has the fewest defects.

Boards can be ordered up to 30 mm thick; 19 mm is a fairly standard thickness.

Popular species include brush box, blackbutt, spotted gum and jarrah, but there are at least 20 varieties to choose from. See *How to choose 'good wood'*, above right, for buying considerations.

FLOATING FLOORS

Unlike structural timber floors, floating floors aren't nailed or otherwise attached to a subfloor system — they're laid over the existing solid floor.

They can be fitted over tiles, concrete, timber floorboards, plywood, particle board and cork. They're usually installed on underlay, which provides good noise insulation. This makes them ideal for use in multi-storey apartment buildings and homes.

Because floating floors aren't nailed down like conventional floorboards, any movement in the boards is spread across the entire floor, which makes gaps less likely to appear.

Floating floors don't even have to be real timber — laminated 'faux' timber finishes are widely available and are commonly referred to as laminate flooring. If you go for the cheaper faux look, make sure you're happy with how closely (or otherwise) it resembles the real thing.

Typically, 'real' timber floating floors consist of a thin layer of softwood or hardwood bonded to a high-density fibreboard substrate. They're often precoated to enhance their wearability (polyurethane is common), but it's possible to coat after installation.

Unlike laminate flooring, real timber floating floors can be sanded back and refurbished if necessary.

Floating floors vary in cost according to the thickness and species of the feature timber layer. Prices start from around $40/m² up to $100/m² (which may or may not include underlay — around $5–$10/m²). Laminated 'timber-look' products are priced from around $25/m².

Choosing a floating floor gives you the option of DIY installation — a significant advantage if you're looking to save money. To install a floating floor:

- Ensure the floor it will cover is level enough. Some products have variation limits, so it's important to check your floor suits the product.
- Remove any pre-existing soft floor covering.
- Some products require an acclimatisation period in the room where they'll be installed (a day or two is common).
- If the floor to be covered is concrete, lay plastic lining to moisture-proof it.
- Lay underlay and allow it to settle.
- Measure, cut the boards to size and install.

How to choose 'good wood'

While timber is generally regarded as a good environmental building material choice, the logging of native old-growth forests remains a subject of heated debate. Green groups argue for a complete ban while timber industry groups say logging of these areas can be sustainable.

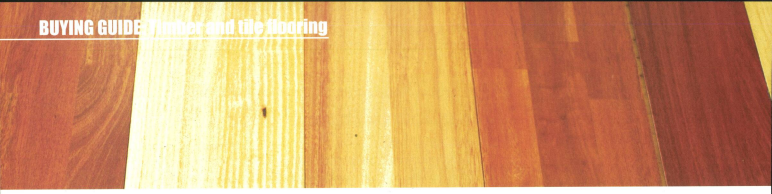
If you're concerned about the logging of native old-growth forests, buy flooring products reliably certified to be of plantation origin, or use recycled timber products.

Currently there's only one accreditation scheme that gets universal approval from green groups — it's the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification scheme. You can be sure that FSC-certified timber doesn't originate from old-growth forests. However, comparatively few FSC timber products are available in Australia.

Some local manufacturers and retailers claim they avoid old-growth forest materials, but in most cases you'll just have to take their word for it.

BRITS HIT THE DECK

Over the last five years, British accident statistics hove shown a fourfold increase in people showing up at hospital after falling on their floor. It's been speculated that this is due to Britain's new love affair with the timber floor. According to The Times, *after ripping up their carpets, Brits seem "less well versed in the art of moving across a shiny surface".*



- Generally, installation during extreme weather conditions isn't recommended and some products recommend installation by a professional. Typical professional installation costs are around $30–$40/m², which includes underlay.

TIMBER FLOORING TIPS

To keep your timber floors looking good:

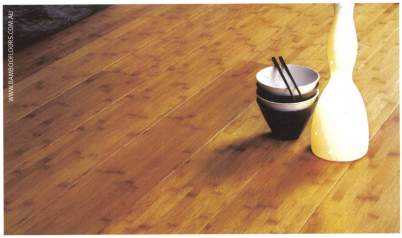
- Avoid direct sunlight. Draw curtains and blinds if possible — new floors, in particular, can be vulnerable to fading in direct sunlight. Heat generated by too much sunlight exposure may also cause localised changes in moisture content, causing warping.
- Keep your floors dry. Vacuuming or sweeping is best. Preferably don't use detergent and use water sparingly. For stubborn spots use a mixture of one cup of methylated spirits in a bucket of water. Quickly wipe up spills to prevent moisture from getting beneath the boards, where it may lead to swelling or mould problems.
- Put door mats at entry points or make your home a shoe-free zone. This will reduce scratches and scrapes from dragged-in dirt and will lengthen the period before you have to resand and seal or polish.
- Use protective pads to stop furniture scratching the floor.

SHOULD YOU BAMBOO?

Bamboo is a renewable resource that grows faster than timber. It's also a very hard-wearing and durable surface. For these reasons it's becoming a popular flooring alternative to timber (see the photo, below).

When our sister organisation in the US tested two samples of bamboo flooring in 2002, it found that while abrasion resistance was very high, UV colour stability wasn't so good — it tended to darken. So the same advice applies to bamboo as timber — protect it from direct sunlight.

Bamboo costs around $90/m² for either structural or floating-floor boards. Installation of structural boards will cost you around $50–60/m².



WWW.BAMBOOFLOORS.COM.AU

TILE STYLES

There's a vast array of vinyl, ceramic, natural and man-made stone tiles in an huge range of designs and styles.

Porcelain tiles are a type of ceramic and are good for indoor and outdoor flooring — they're more hard-wearing and easier to maintain than natural stone. They come in two types: glazed or vitrified (also known as full-bodied). The difference is that vitrified tiles are the same colour all the way through, so unlike glazed tiles, if they're chipped or in very heavy wear situations, they'll retain their original colour.

Vitrified porcelain tiles come in a 'natural' (from around $50/m²) or polished finish (from around $90/m²).

Natural stone like travertine, shellstone, limestone and marble are also popular floor-tiling materials. They typically require regular sealing to protect them from water and wear, because natural stone tends to be porous. Prices start from around $80/m².

Depending on your particular situation, installation of tiles will generally add around another $50/m² to the cost.

OTHER OPTIONS

Some examples of other flooring materials you may not have considered include:

- **Cork:** Pros include hard-wearing aesthetic appeal and comfy, soft, warm feel underfoot. It's also easy to clean when sealed and resists fading. On the downside, it has relatively poor water and stain resistance unless it's well-sealed.
- **Rubber:** Pros include softness underfoot, durability and fade-resistance. Cons include being relatively difficult to clean and poor resistance to marks/stains and indentations.
- **Vinyl:** Pros include an almost inexhaustible range of styles, patterns and colours, easy maintenance, fairly soft underfoot and good fade-resistance. It's also priced to suit a range of budgets and is easy to install, even DIY. Cons include poor resistance to scratching and indentations, and cheaper versions may be considered a relatively short-term flooring option. ■

Most of the cheap home theatre systems on test don't give you much bang for your buck.

That's entertainment?

The predator creeping up from behind, the car fanging from left to right across the screen, the building that explodes on your right — cinema gives you a wealth of audio experiences that complement the action up onscreen. So with the growth of DVDs and games capable of providing those same effects, not to mention some TV movies now being broadcast in Dolby Digital 5.1, it's no surprise home theatre systems — a set of speakers pumping out surround sound from movies or games in the couch-potato comfort of your lounge room — are becoming popular.

To complement our recent test of widescreen TVs (CHOICE, October 2004) we've taken a look at nine home theatre systems at the bargain end of the market. All are integrated systems that offer surround sound, provided by four satellite speakers, a centre speaker and a subwoofer for bass, a surround-sound receiver, a DVD/CD player and a radio tuner. Combine this with a decent screen and you'd hope they gave you an almost cinema-quality experience. But based on our tests, we found you have to choose your system very carefully.

IN THE PICTURE

Generally the picture quality from the DVD players was very good. Any errors that were observed were minor and would only be noticeable on high-resolution display devices.

However, not all the players could cope with flaws on discs — which may be a problem if you hire a lot of DVDs. The exception here was the **LG**, which scored 100% in our disc error tests, followed by the **SANYO**, **PIONEER** and **PANASONIC**, which were all very good. The rest fared less well and had trouble with badly scratched discs.

SOUNDS DIFFERENT?

It was with sound, however, that things started to go downhill. Overall, while most of the systems are comparable to low to mid-range mini stereo systems in terms of their electronics and features, they generally have smaller speakers and rely on the subwoofer to provide bass. As such, they're unlikely to make a music lover happy.

The listening tests showed most of the systems provide limited, boxy sounds, making vocals sound nasal. And while they can make

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Most bargain-price home theatre** *systems won't give you sound comparable to a hifi, so you'll mostly be disappointed if you plan to use one to listen to music CDs.*
- **The systems aren't easy to set up** *and it takes a while to get used to the features, remote control and navigation system.*
- **If you mainly want to play DVD** *movies and games and the system will be in a small to medium-sized room, our recommended buys can give you a satisfying enough result.*

WHAT TO BUY

PIONEER HTD-BDVD	$799
PANASONIC HT878	$899
SONY DAVSB300	$899

BEFORE YOU BUY

Before you leave home to buy your new home theatre system, check that your existing television has an audio/video (AV) input terminal. If it doesn't, you can't connect a home theatre system to it. This is likely only to be the case with very old TVs, which only have an RF (antenna) connection.

quite a lot of noise, it doesn't always sound authentic. Most subwoofers are also poorly integrated with the other speakers, either providing excess boom and a disjointed bass line or not reproducing a significant chunk of the upper bass. This isn't such a big deal if you're using your home theatre to watch movies — an explosion sounds like an explosion — but if you like playing music, particularly something like Wagner or techno, there's a high probability most will distort the mid bass to an irritating level. The best picks here are the **PANASONIC** and the **LG**, which both have very low levels of bass distortion.

If you can live with these limitations, the top three models in this test, the **SONY**, **PIONEER** and **PANASONIC**, can all provide a satisfying movie experience and a reasonable stereo music sound if well set up in a small space.

TEARS BEFORE MOVIE TIME

For these systems to achieve decent sound effects you need to spend some time placing the speakers correctly in your space (see *Setting up your home theatre*, page 42), mounting them on stands or walls as necessary.

The good news is that with a subwoofer to handle the bass the other speakers are mostly pretty small — allowing them to be mounted on a wall or tucked out of sight (except the **SONY** and **PANASONIC**, which have column speakers).

The bad news is you almost need a degree in engineering to set them up: the manuals provided are mostly complicated, inadequate or confusing — and in the case of the **NEC** handbook, the diagram was misleading. In short, don't kid yourself assembly is going to be a quick job: as well as having to figure out the wiring for six speakers (and how to run the cables either under carpet or along your skirting boards so you're not forever tripping over them), you also need to ensure the correct speaker is connected to the right terminals in the receiver in the correct manner. Fail to do this and your sound will likely be inconsistent and move in the opposite direction to the action onscreen.

Then once you have your system set up, you still have to figure out the remote control and onscreen navigation tools. The verdict on remotes was that most weren't that well thought out and took time to become familiar with, though the **PIONEER**, **LG** and **TEAC** earned plaudits for good design. The onscreen navigation tools are also confusing on many machines, though the **PIONEER**, **SONY** and **LG** compared favorably. Top scorer overall for ease of use was the **PIONEER**.

CHOICE VERDICT

Overall we were disappointed, and if you're looking to one of these home theatre systems to replace your hifi, chances are you will be too. Their sound quality — particularly if you're planning to play a lot of CDs — generally isn't up to the standard we've come to expect from sound systems. Even the models in the *What to buy* list (see page 39 and right) will give you only an OK stereo sound, as long as you take care to set up the system well.

On the other hand, if you'll mainly use your system for movies and games and it'll be in a small to medium-sized room, you may well find one of our recommended systems gives you the cinema-from-the-comfort-of-home experience you've been craving.

Features (almost) all have

- They're integrated systems with a main surround-sound receiver unit, one-disc DVD player (except the **PIONEER** and **TEAC**, which have a five-disc changer), four satellite speakers (two front, two rear), one centre speaker, one subwoofer and an AM/FM radio tuner (except the **NEC**, which only has FM).
- Disc functions: Fast play, slow motion, pause, frame-by-frame, parental lock, resume play, repeat modes, title/chapter search.
- Screen proportions (aspect ratios) available: 4:3 pan & scan, 4:3 letterbox, widescreen (16:9), progressive scan (with component video output only, except for the **NEC**, which doesn't have it), zoom mode (except the **SONY**).
- Audio surround modes: Dolby ProLogic II (except the **SANYO**), Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1 (except the **SANYO** and **TEAC**), dynamic range control (except the **TEAC** and **NEC**).
- Subwoofer volume adjust.
- At least 30 preset FM and AM channel positions (the **NEC** has FM only).
- Sleep timer (except the **TEAC**).
- Remote control.
- One each of the following outputs: composite video (except the **LG**, **NEC** and **YAMAHA**, which have two), component video (except the **NEC**) and S-video; FM and AM antennas (except the **NEC**, which doesn't need an AM one).
- We were able to play the following disc formats on all models: CD audio, CD-R (audio), CD-R (MP3), DVD-video, DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW. (For the uninitiated, all but audio CD and video DVD would contain files you'd burned yourself from a computer, for example.)

For more information on many of the features listed here, see *Tech talk translated*, page 43.

Profiles

Home theatre systems in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2004.

PIONEER HTD-8DVD

Price: $799

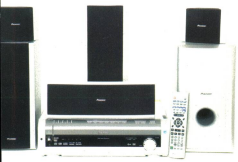
Five-disc changer with large front speakers.

GOOD POINTS

- High-powered system whose sound is capable of filling a larger room.
- The easiest to use.
- Movie effects are dynamic and powerful.
- Very low standby power consumption.

BAD POINTS

- Rear speakers don't sound too good.
- Treble somewhat bright.



PANASONIC HT878

Price: $899

Single-disc player with four tall column-style speakers.

GOOD POINTS

- Sound effects for movies relatively good, with high impact and good surround effects.
- The only system in the test to play DVD-RAM discs.
- Good FM tuner.
- Very low standby power consumption.
- Stands supplied for speakers.

BAD POINTS

- Some lack of realism about vocals in music.

SONY DAVS300

Price: $899

Single-disc player with four tall column-type speakers.

GOOD POINTS

- The best for sound quality.
- High-powered system whose sound is capable of filling a larger room.
- The only system that can play SACD-format discs (high-resolution audio — see *Tech talk translated*, page 43).
- Floor-standing speakers don't need mounting.

BAD POINTS

- The worst ease of use score, particularly due to the complex and intimidating remote control.
- The centre speaker has a boxy sound.

PROFILES: CONSUMER

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **LG LHT1000** handles disc errors very well but the listening test gave mixed results. It would require careful adjustment for satisfactory sound.
- The **PHILIPS LX3600D** has problems handling loud volumes — the disc stops playing.
- The **YAMAHA DVX-S120** didn't cope with our test disc errors at all well, is difficult to set up and has a hard-to-understand remote control and navigation system.
- The **TEAC PLD1620M** has a very clunky control system, is slow to read and change discs and it rated below average for ease of use.
- The **SANYO DCTS760** has high standby power consumption, the worst-rated speakers and in the listening test its sound was described as harsh and distorted. It also rated below average for ease of use.
- The **NEC DHT-300** didn't handle our test disc errors well, has a poor internal decoder that in some modes fails to provide surround-sound formats, and the listening test found its sound harsh and boxy. It too rated below average for ease of use.

LG LHT1000

PHILIPS LX3600D

YAMAHA DVX-S120

TEAC PLD1620M

SANYO DCTS760

NEC DHT-300

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Disc error score (%)	6 Standby power score (%)	7 Power (front / centre / rear / subwoofer, W)	FEATURES Bass / treble adjust	Fixed bass boost	8 Mu zonir
PIONEER HTD-BDVD	83	94	73	79	96	98	66 / 85 / 59 / 75	✓	✓	✓
PANASONIC HT878	80	97	67	72	95	95	48 / 109 / 48 / **(B)**		✓	✓
SONY DAVSB300	77	97	77	64	64	78	58 / 85 / 67 / 161		✓	✓
LG LHT1000	72	89	56	71	100	78	58 / 58 / 53 / 110			
PHILIPS LX3600D	71	92	60	72	75	66	59 / 59 / 57 / 59			✓
YAMAHA DVX-S120 **(A)**	71	97	55	70	53	98	43 / 51 / 40 / **(B)**	✓		✓
TEAC PLD1620M	68	88	52	67	72	92	17 / 19 / 17 / **(B)**	✓		✓
SANYO DCTS760	63	95	45	68	95	26	26 / 25 / 22 / 38	✓	✓	✓
NEC DHT-300	62	90	49	67	55	52	37 / 33 / 39 / 36			

* *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2004.*

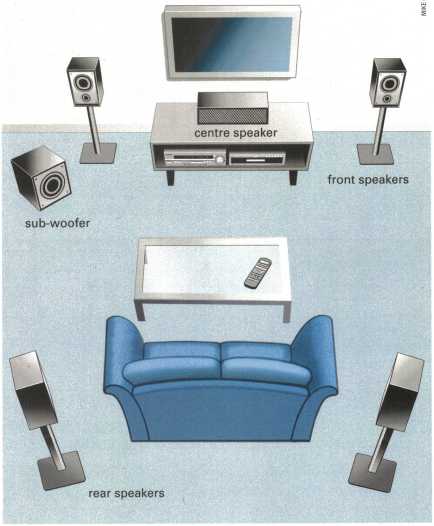
(A) *Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.*

(B) *Active subwoofer (see* Tech talk translated, *right); their power output wasn't measured.*

SETTING UP YOUR HOME THEATRE

Ideally, you'll have a space something like in the illustration on the right, and be able to set up your speakers as shown in the diagram. But chances are you won't. The following tips can help you maximise the sound from your home theatre system:

- The best position for your front speakers is at ear level (when you're seated), as soundtracks are likely to be optimised for that location.
- The rear speakers are best positioned to the side and slightly behind and above the listener.
- The centre speaker handles most dialogue and sounds from the central focus of the picture. It should be on or just below the TV.
- The subwoofer can be placed on the floor almost anywhere in the room, as most people can't tell where a bass sound is coming from. Experiment with the location, as small placement adjustments can make a big difference to sound quality.
- Ideally all speakers would be placed at roughly the same distance from you, but your room may mean you end up with some closer and some further away. If this happens the speakers will need to be calibrated. All systems enable you to change relative volume levels on each speaker and to delay the sound so it's synchronised — but it's a tricky job and could take you some time.



MIKE GORMAN

phone	Headphone socket	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*
	✓	2	Pioneer	799
	✓	1	Panasonic	899
	✓	1	Sony	899
	✓	1	LG	699
		3	Philips	549
	✓	2	Yamaha	899
		1	TEAC	299
	✓	1	Sanyo	399
	✓	1	NEC	799

1 Overall score
The overall score is made up as follows:
- Picture quality: 20%
- Sound quality: 40%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Disc error handling: 10%
- Standby power: 10%

2 Picture quality score
Includes tests for sharpness of image and colour accuracy.

3 Sound quality score
- Listening test: 75%
- Technical audio measurements: 25%

4 Ease of use score
- Remote control: 35%
- Onscreen display and operations: 25%
- Connections: 10%
- Front panel controls: 10%
- Controls on system: 10%
- Handbook: 10%

5 Disc error handling score
- DVD error handling: 50%
- CD error handling: 50%

6 Standby power score
The amount of power the system uses when it's plugged into the mains but not being used. High usage wastes electricity and your money. The **SANYO** is particularly poor and the **NEC** not very good, while the other models show this doesn't have to be the case.

7 Power
This tells you how loud each speaker can go, measured at 10% distortion. (This is normal for cheaper systems — for hifi systems, power is measured at 1% distortion; you can hear 10% distortion.)

8 Multizoning
Multizone systems can play discs from anywhere in the world. The rest are zone 4 (Australasia), which in theory limits them to playing discs made for this part of the world. But most zone 4 players can be converted to multizone, either permanently or using a menu system for each disc. Check in the shop before you buy.

Tech talk translated

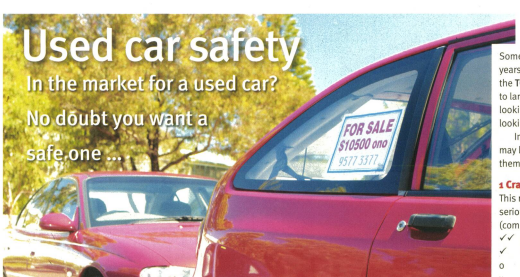
- **Aspect ratio:** TV screen proportions. The traditional screen aspect ratio is 4:3; widescreen is 16:9.
- **4:3 pan & scan:** Crops widescreen (16:9 aspect ratio) movies so they fit onto a standard TV with a 4:3 aspect ratio, either by cutting the edges of the picture off or, if the action is over one side, panning there and cutting off most of the other side.
- **4:3 letterbox:** Used to fit widescreen movies into a 4:3 screen, using black bars around the image that 'letterbox' it.
- **CD-R (audio):** Writable music CD, can only be written to ('burned') once.
- **CD-R (MP3):** Writable music CD, can only be burned once. Much greater capacity than CD-R due to compression.
- **Dolby Digital 5.1:** Surround-sound mix with six separate digital channels (one for each of the five speakers and one for the subwoofer).
- **Dolby ProLogic** (or **Dolby Surround**): Comes in either four-channel or five-channel (called **ProLogic II**). It provides sound from four or five speakers respectively, but the technology isn't as refined as Dolby Digital 5.1 or DTS.
- **DTS:** Digital theatre system. Similar to Dolby Digital 5.1, but the signal is less compressed and may give a better sound.
- **DVD-RAM:** Rewritable DVD storage disc, mainly used for storing data. Generally the most reliable and most expensive discs. (Mainly found on **PANASONIC** equipment.)
- **DVD-R** or **DVD+R:** Writable DVDs, best suited to recording video. Can only be burned once.
- **DVD-RW** or **DVD+RW:** Rewritable DVDs, best used for video.
- **Dynamic range control:** Dynamic range is the difference between the lowest and highest audio levels; a dynamic range control can manipulate the level of a signal to ensure a listener perceives levels evenly.

- **Progressive scan:** Generally provides a better-quality picture. Images are scanned completely from top to bottom, rather than the more traditional interlacing, which refreshes only every second line of the image. Both the DVD player and display device (such as a TV) have to have progressive scan to get the benefit.
- **SACD-format:** 'Super audio compact disc' — an audio format that provides high-resolution audio in either two-channel stereo or multi-channel audio; it can support up to six full-frequency channels.
- **Subwoofer:** A large speaker that produces very low-frequency (bass) sounds. There are two types:

Active: Contains a separate amplifier that reduces the drain on the main amplifier and may allow for better clarity in the bass sounds. The **PANASONIC, YAMAHA** and **TEAC** in this test have one, though it didn't seem to have much positive impact on sound quality for the latter two models.

Passive: Relies entirely on the main amplifier for power.

- **Video output:** The most basic is composite video; S-video gives better picture quality and component video currently the best.
- **Zoom mode:** Gets rid of the black bars around movies that aren't 16:9 (widescreen) aspect ratio, at the cost of losing some of the picture.



TAMARA GRAHAM

IN A NUTSHELL

The used car safety *ratings are based on real-life accident data. They assess how well a model protects its own driver and the driver of the other vehicle in an on-road crash.*

Choosing a safe car model could mean the difference between getting out of an accident with a fright or with a serious injury. Many new models offer sophisticated crash design and a range of safety equipment, such as front, side and head airbags, and intelligent restraint systems. But what if you're looking at buying an older car?

The latest used car safety ratings can help you make a decision. They're based on a study by the Monash University Accident Research Centre that analysed more than 1.5 million crashes between 1987 and 2002 on roads in NSW and Victoria, and between 1991 and 2002 in Queensland, WA and New Zealand.

The ratings look at models manufactured between 1982 and 2002, and show how well a car protects its driver in an accident (crashworthiness), and also how much it endangers the driver of another vehicle involved in the crash (aggressivity) compared to the average of all models. If you drive one of the worst models for crashworthiness, you're at least 30% more likely to sustain serious injury or even die in a serious crash than if you were in one of the best models.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

The results show some trends:

- Larger and more expensive used cars usually offer better protection for their drivers — not least because safety equipment such as airbags and ABS brakes weren't commonly found in smaller and cheaper cars until recently. But a few small cars also scored better than average for crashworthiness.
- Heavy cars (such as large 4WDs and some large sedans) often have good crashworthiness but bad aggressivity due to simple physics (if a heavy car collides with a light one, the light one is usually worse off) and, in the case of 4WDs, to the higher ride height.
- The safety of a particular model often (but not always) improves over time due to better crash design and improved safety equipment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If you're in the market for a used car, some of the above findings may not seem very helpful. You probably have a certain budget (so the safer luxury car may not be an option) and certain needs (for example, most of your driving may be done in the city, so a large 4WD wouldn't make much sense).

So the used car safety ratings can only be part of your research to find the best model for you. Once you've decided on the best type of car for your needs, find the best model by comparing a range of aspects such as:

- **Specifications, features and price** — for example, from our online used car database, covering all models available in Australia since 1960. For a limited time, the database will be available free on www.choiceextra.com.au (under 'Cars' in the index).
- **Reliability** — such as from the CHOICE reliability survey (last published in CHOICE, September 2001, and also on CHOICEextra).
- **Repair costs** — for example, from the **NRMA Insurance** low-speed crash tests regularly published in CHOICE (May 2004 and CHOICEextra have the latest results).
- **Safety** — from the ANCAP high-speed new-car lab crash tests (last published in CHOICE, October 2004, and on CHOICEextra) and this latest real-life accident used car safety rating.
- **Fuel efficiency** — try the Fuel Efficiency Guide, published by the Australian Greenhouse Office (www.greenhouse.gov.au/transport/fuelguide).

Sometimes a car model changes category over the years as its specifications change (for example, the **TOYOTA Camry** has moved from medium to large car). So if you can't find the car you're looking for where you'd expect to find it, try looking at a few other categories.

In addition, some year models of some cars may be missing, due to lack of sufficient data for them.

1 Crashworthiness

This rating shows how well the car prevents serious injury to the driver in an accident (compared to the average of all the rated cars):

- ✓✓ Much better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- x Worse protection than average.
- xx Much worse protection than average.

2 Aggressivity

This shows the injury risk the vehicle poses to the driver of another car in an accident (compared to the average of all the rated cars). Ideally, a car should protect not only its own occupants, but also those of other cars.

- ✓✓ Much better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- x Worse protection than average.
- xx Much worse protection than average.
- na Not applicable: no rating possible — insufficient data.

Make and model; year of manufacture (in order of crashworthiness, alphabetically when equal)	1 Crashworthiness	2 Aggressivity
LARGE CARS		
FORD Falcon AU 1998-2002	✓✓	o
FORD Falcon EA/EB Series I 1988-Mar 1992	✓✓	✗
FORD Falcon EF/EL 1994-1998	✓✓	✗
HOLDEN Commodore VT/VX 1997-2002	✓✓	✗
HOLDEN / TOYOTA Commodore VR/VS / Lexcen 1993-1997	✓✓	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TE/TF/TH/TJ / Verada KE/KF/KH/KJ 1996-2002	✓✓	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TR/TS / Verada KR/KS 1991-1996	✓✓	o
FORD Falcon EB Series II / ED Apr 1992-1994	✓	✗
FORD Falcon XE/XF 1982-1988	✓	o
HOLDEN / TOYOTA Apollo JM/JP / Camry 1993-1997	✓	o
HOLDEN / TOYOTA Commodore VN/VP / Lexcen 1989-1993	✓	o
TOYOTA Avalon 2000-2002	✓	✗✗
TOYOTA Camry 1998-2002	✓	o
FORD Taurus 1996-1998	o	na
HYUNDAI Sonata 1998-2001	o	na
HYUNDAI Sonata 1989-1997	o	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TM/TN/TP 1985-1990	o	o
NISSAN Skyline 1983-1988	o	o
HOLDEN Commodore VB-VL 1982-1988	✗	o
MEDIUM CARS		
FORD Mondeo 1995-2001	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Vectra 1997-2002	✓✓	o
SUBARU Liberty 1999-2002	✓✓	o
FORD / MAZDA Telstar / 626 / MX6 1988-1991	✓	o
FORD / MAZDA Telstar / 626 / MX6 1992-1997	✓	✓
HOLDEN / TOYOTA Apollo JK/JL / Camry 1988-1992	✓	o
NISSAN Bluebird 1993-1997	✓	o
SUBARU Liberty 1989-1993	✓	o
DAEWOO Leganza 1997-2002	o	na
FORD / MAZDA Telstar / 626 / MX6 1983-1986	o	✓
MAZDA 626 1998-2002	o	o
MITSUBISHI Galant 1995-1996	o	o
MITSUBISHI Sigma 1982-1984	o	✓
NISSAN / FORD Pintara / Corsair 1989-1992	o	o
NISSAN Pintara 1986-1988	o	o
SUBARU Liberty 1994-1998	o	o
TOYOTA Camry 1983-1986	o	o
TOYOTA Corona 1982-1988	o	✓
DAEWOO Espero 1995-1997	✗	na
NISSAN Bluebird 1982-1986	✗	✓
SUBARU 1800 / Leone 1982-1993	✗	✓✓
HOLDEN Camira 1982-1989	✗✗	✓
SMALL CARS		
HOLDEN Astra TR 1996-1998	✓✓	o
PEUGEOT 306 1994-2001	✓✓	o
TOYOTA Corolla 1998-2001	✓✓	o
NISSAN Pulsar / Vector 1992-1995	✓	✓
ALFA ROMEO 33 1983-1992	o	na
DAEWOO Nubira 1997-2002	o	o
DAIHATSU Applause 1989-1999	o	o
FIAT Regata 1984-1988	o	na
FORD Laser 1991-1994	o	✓✓
FORD Laser 1995-1997	o	o
FORD / MAZDA Laser / 323 1999-2002	o	o
HOLDEN Astra TS 1998-2002	o	o
HONDA Civic 1982-1983	o	✓✓
HONDA Civic 1988-1991	o	✓
HONDA Civic 1992-1995	o	o
HONDA Civic 1996-2000	o	✓✓
HONDA Concerto 1989-1993	o	o
HYUNDAI Lantra 1991-1995	o	o
HYUNDAI Lantra 1996-2000	o	o
HYUNDAI S Coupé 1990-1996	o	o
MAZDA 323 1990-1993	o	✓✓
MAZDA 323 1995-1998	o	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer 1989-1990	o	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer 1991-1992	o	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer 1993-1995	o	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer / Mirage CE 1996-2002	o	✓
NISSAN Pulsar 2000-2002	o	o
NISSAN Stanza 1982-1983	o	na
PROTON Wira 1995-1996	o	o
ROVER Quintet 1982-1986	o	na
SUBARU Impreza 1993-2000	o	o
SUZUKI Baleno 1995-2002	o	na
TOYOTA Corolla 2002	o	na
TOYOTA Corolla 4WD Wagon 1992-1996	o	na
TOYOTA Tercel 1983-1988	o	na
TOYOTA / HOLDEN Corolla / Nova 1989-1993	o	✓✓
TOYOTA / HOLDEN Corolla / Nova 1994-1997	o	✓✓
VOLKSWAGEN Golf 1995-1998	o	o
VOLKSWAGEN Golf / Bora 1999-2002	o	na
HOLDEN Gemini 1982-1984	✗	✓✓
HOLDEN Gemini RB 1986-1987	✗	o
HOLDEN / NISSAN Astra / Pulsar / Vector 1988-1990	✗	✓
MITSUBISHI Cordia 1983-1987	✗	o
NISSAN Pulsar / Vector 1996-1999	✗	o
TOYOTA Corolla 1982-1984	✗	✓✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1986-1988	✗	✓✓
FORD / MAZDA Laser / 323 1982-1988	✗✗	✓✓
HOLDEN / NISSAN Astra / Pulsar 1984-1986	✗✗	✓✓
HONDA Civic 1984-1987	✗✗	✓
LIGHT CARS		
DAEWOO 1.5i 1994-1995	o	na
DAEWOO Cielo 1995-1997	o	✓✓
DAEWOO Lanos 1997-2002	o	o
DAIHATSU Sirion 1998-2002	o	na
MAZDA 121 1994-1996	o	✓✓
MAZDA 121 Metro 1997-2002	o	✓✓
PEUGEOT 205 1987-1994	o	na
TOYOTA Echo 1999-2002	o	✓
TOYOTA Starlet 1996-1999	o	✓
VOLKSWAGEN Polo 1996-2000	o	na
HOLDEN Barina SB 1995-2000	✗	✓
HYUNDAI Accent 2000-2002	✗	o
HYUNDAI Excel 1990-1994	✗	✓✓
HYUNDAI Excel / Accent 1995-2000	✗	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1982-1986	✗✗	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1988-1992	✗✗	✓✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1993-2000	✗✗	✓✓
DAIHATSU Mira 1990-1996	✗✗	o
FORD Festiva WD/WH/WF 1994-2001	✗✗	✓✓
FORD / MAZDA Festiva WA / 121 1987-1990	✗✗	✓✓
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Barina / Swift 1986-1988	✗✗	✓✓
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Barina / Swift 1989-1999	✗✗	✓✓
HONDA City 1983-1986	✗✗	na
HYUNDAI Excel 1986-1990	✗✗	✓
MITSUBISHI Mirage / Colt 1982-1988	✗✗	✓
NISSAN Micra 1995-1997	✗✗	na
SUBARU Sherpa / Fiori 1989-1992	✗✗	na
SUZUKI Hatch 1982-1984	✗✗	na
LUXURY CARS		
HONDA Legend 1986-1995	✓✓	o
SAAB 9000 1986-1997	✓✓	na
VOLVO 700/900 Series 1984-1992	✓✓	o
BMW 3 Series E30 1982-1991	✓	o
BMW 3 Series E36 1992-1998	✓	o
LEXUS ES300 1992-2001	✓	o
MERCEDES BENZ C-Class W202 1995-2000	✓	o
MERCEDES BENZ E-Class W124 1986-1994	✓	o
VOLVO 850/S70/V70/C70 1992-2002	✓	✗

Continued overleaf

Continued from page 45

Make and model; year of manufacture (in order of crashworthiness, alphabetically when equal)	1 Crashworthiness	2 Aggressivity
BMW 5 Series E28 1982-1988	o	na
BMW 5 Series E34 1989-1995	o	o
JAGUAR XJ6 1982-1986	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ C-Class W201 1987-1993	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ E-Class W123 1982-1985	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ S-Class W126 1982-1992	o	o
PRESTIGE CARS		
FORD Fairlane N & LTD D 1988-1994	✓✓	o
TOYOTA Cressida 1989-1993	✓✓	o
VOLVO 200 Series 1982-1993	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice VR/VS 1994-1998	✓	o
HONDA Accord 1986-1990	✓	o
HONDA Accord 1991-1993	✓	✓
HONDA Accord 1994-1998	✓	o
NISSAN Maxima 1995-1999	✓	✓
PEUGEOT 505 1982-1993	✓	na
SAAB 900/9-3 1994-2002	✓	o
AUDI A4 1995-2001	o	na
FORD Fairlane N & LTD D 1995-1998	o	✗
FORD Fairlane Z & LTD F 1982-1987	o	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice VQ 1990-1993	o	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice WB 1982-1985	o	na
MAZDA 929 1982-1990	o	o
NISSAN Maxima 1990-1994	o	o
PEUGEOT 405 1989-1997	o	o
SAAB 900 Series 1982-1992	o	na
TOYOTA Crown / Cressida 1982-1985	o	o
TOYOTA Crown / Cressida 1986-1988	o	o
VOLVO 300 Series 1984-1988	o	na
HONDA Accord 1982-1985	✗	✓✓
SPORTS CARS		
HOLDEN Calibra 1994-1997	✓	o
HONDA Integra 1990-1992	✓	o
HONDA Integra 1993-2001	✓	o
TOYOTA Celica 1981-1985	✓	o
HONDA CRX 1992-1998	o	na
HONDA Integra 1986-1988	o	✓
HONDA Prelude 1983-1991	o	o
HONDA Prelude 1992-1996	o	o
MAZDA MX5 1989-1997	o	na
MAZDA RX7 1982-1985	o	na
MAZDA RX7 1986-1991	o	na
NISSAN 200SX 1994-2002	o	na
NISSAN Exa 1987-1991	o	na
NISSAN 300ZX 1990-1995	o	na
RENAULT Fuego 1982-1987	o	na
TOYOTA Celica 1986-1989	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 1990-1993	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 1994-1999	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 2000-2002	o	✓
TOYOTA MR2 1991-2000	o	na
TOYOTA Paseo 1991-1999	o	o
FORD Capri 1989-1994	✗	o
HONDA CRX 1987-1991	✗	o
HYUNDAI Coupé 1996-2000	✗	o
NISSAN Gazelle 1984-1986	✗	o
TOYOTA Supra 1982-1990	✗	na
NISSAN Exa 1983-1986	✗✗	na
NISSAN NX/NX-R 1991-1996	✗✗	✗✗
TOYOTA MR2 1987-1990	✗✗	na
COMPACT 4WD		
HONDA CR-V 1997-2001	✓✓	o
SUBARU Forester 1997-2002	✓✓	na
TOYOTA RAV4 1994-2000	✓	o
DAIHATSU Feroza 1989-1997	o	o
DAIHATSU Terios 1997-2002	o	na
HONDA HR-V 1999-2002	o	na
LADA Niva 1984-1999	o	o
SUZUKI Grand Vitara 1999-2002	o	o
SUZUKI Vitara 1988-1998	o	o
DAIHATSU Rocky 1985-1998	✗✗	✗✗
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Drover / Sierra 1982-1999	✗✗	✓✓
MEDIUM 4WD		
MITSUBISHI Pajero 1982-1999	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Jackaroo 1982-1991	✓	o
HOLDEN Jackaroo 1992-1997	✓	na
JEEP Cherokee XJ 1996-2000	✓	o
LAND ROVER Discovery 1991-2002	✓	o
LAND ROVER Defender 1992-2002	o	na
MITSUBISHI Pajero 1982-1990	o	✗✗
NISSAN Pathfinder 1988-1994	o	o
NISSAN Pathfinder 1995-2002	o	o
LARGE 4WD		
LAND ROVER Range Rover 1982-1994	✓✓	✗✗
NISSAN Patrol 1998-2002	✓✓	✗✗
NISSAN / FORD Patrol / Maverick 1988-1997	✓✓	✗✗
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1990-1997	✓✓	✗✗
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1998-2002	✓✓	✗
NISSAN Patrol 1982-1987	✓	✗✗
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1982-1989	o	✗✗
PEOPLE MOVERS		
MITSUBISHI Nimbus 1992-1998	✓	o
TOYOTA Tarago 1991-1999	✓	o
MITSUBISHI Nimbus 1985-1991	o	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon 1995-1998	o	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon 1998-2002	o	na
NISSAN Prairie 1984-1986	o	na
MITSUBISHI Starwagon 1987-1993	✗	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon / L300 1983-1986	✗✗	✗
TOYOTA Tarago 1983-1989	✗✗	o
UTILITIES		
HOLDEN Rodeo 1996-1998	✓✓	o
FORD Falcon Ute 1996-1999	✓	o
FORD Falcon Ute AU 2000-2002	✓	o
HOLDEN Commodore Ute VR/VS 1994-2000	✓	✗
NISSAN Navara 1992-1996	✓	o
NISSAN Navara 1997-2002	✓	o
TOYOTA 4Runner / Hilux 1989-1997	✓	✗
TOYOTA Hilux 1998-2002	✓	o
FORD Ford F-Series 1982-1992	o	✗✗
FORD / MAZDA Courier / B-Series 1998-2002	o	o
FORD / NISSAN Falcon Ute / XFN Ute 1982-1995	o	✗
HOLDEN Commodore Ute VG/VP 1990-1993	o	o
HOLDEN Commodore VU Ute 2000-2002	o	na
HOLDEN Rodeo 1982-1985	o	✗
HOLDEN Rodeo 1989-1995	o	✗✗
HOLDEN Rodeo 1999-2002	o	o
KIA Ceres 1992-2000	o	na
NISSAN 720 Ute 1982-1985	o	o
NISSAN Navara 1986-1991	o	o
TOYOTA 4Runner / Hilux 1986-1988	o	o
HOLDEN WB Series 1982-1985	✗	o
TOYOTA 4Runner / Hilux 1982-1985	✗	✗
SUBARU Brumby 1982-1992	✗✗	o
SUZUKI Mighty Boy 1985-1988	✗✗	na
VANS		
FORD Falcon Panel Van 1982-1995	✓	o
FORD Transit 1995-2000	o	o
HONDA Acty 1983-1986	o	na
TOYOTA Hiace / Liteace 1987-1989	o	✗
TOYOTA Hiace / Liteace 1990-1995	o	✗✗
TOYOTA Hiace / Liteace 1996-2002	o	✗
HOLDEN Shuttle Van 1982-1987	✗	na
DAIHATSU Handivan 1982-1990	✗✗	na
HOLDEN / SUZUKI Scurry / Carry 1982-2000	✗✗	na
TOYOTA Hiace / Liteace 1982-1986	✗✗	✗

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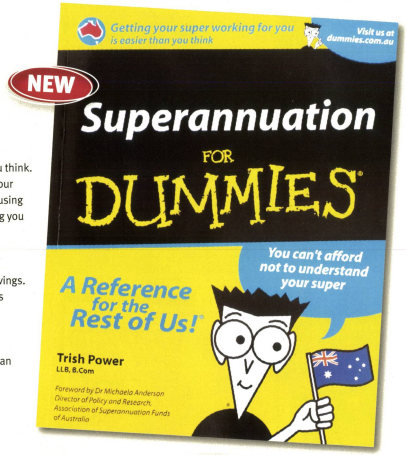
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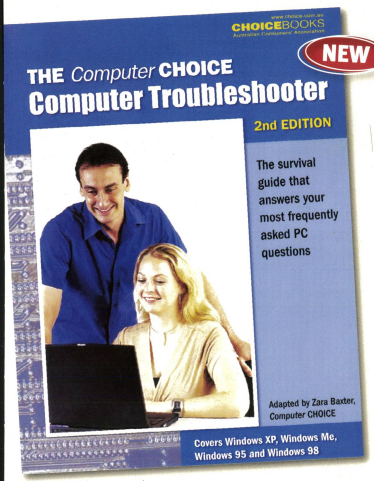
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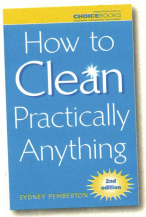

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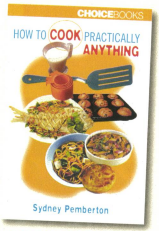

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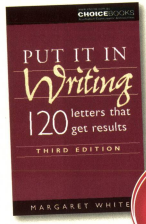

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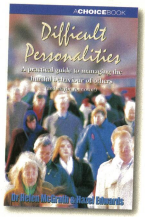

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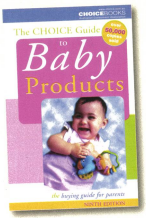

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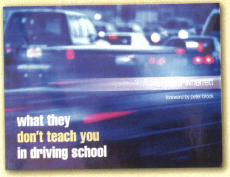

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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

DENTAL PRODUCTS: Colgate-Palmolive has recalled:

- **Colgate Periogard Clorohex Antiseptic Mouth Rinse**, AUST R 26774.
- **Colgate Periogard Clorohex Antiseptic Mouth Gel**, AUST R 26783.
- **Colgate Periogard Clorohex Forte Antiseptic Mouth Gel**, AUST R 26685.

All batches and pack sizes.

The problem: They may be contaminated with the bacterium *Burkholderia cepacia*. This micro-organism can be harmful to people with cystic fibrosis, a suppressed immune system or patients in intensive care environments.

What to do: Stop using them and return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 636 551 to arrange for their return and a refund. If you're concerned about having used this product, contact your doctor.

MEDICINE: Merck Sharp & Dohme has recalled **VIOXX (Rofecoxib)** arthritis medicine, tablets (AUST R 69871, AUST R 69872) and oral suspensions (AUST R 69869, AUST R 69870), all batches and pack sizes.

The problem: New research has shown that in patients who took this medicine for longer than 18 months there was an increased relative risk of heart problems, such as heart attack and stroke.

What to do: Stop taking it and contact your doctor to discuss possible alternative treatments. Return packs (both part and full) to a pharmacy for a refund. For more information call 1800 066 426.

MEDICINE: Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals has recalled **Mixtard 30/70 InnoLet human insulin injection**, batches NS63067 and NS63095, AUST R 75225, sold in WA.

The problem: These batches may have been exposed to frost during distribution to WA. As a result, the delivery mechanism may become jammed and unable to deliver insulin.

What to do: If you're experiencing problems with the InnoLet you're using, contact the NovoCare customer care centre on 1800 668 626 for advice.

MEDICINE: Living Valley Springs has recalled **Olive Leaf Extract**, in 200 mL and 500 mL bottles, expiry date 08/05, all batches up to and including 2017.

The problem: It hasn't been approved for supply.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD: European Gourmet Fine Foods has recalled **Danny's Yoghurt**, various flavours (strawberry, raspberry, mango, passionfruit, blackberry, blueberry, plain and muesli), in 250 g, 350 g and 500 g plastic tubs, all use-by dates (it's no longer being made), sold in NSW (Sydney metro).

The problem: Some may be contaminated with *E.coli*.

What to do: If you froze it for later use, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (02) 9577 9055.

FOOD: Hormel Foods Australia has recalled **Kid's Kitchen Mini Beef Ravioli in Tomato Sauce**, in a 213 g plastic microwave tub, best-before dates Jun to Sep 2005.

The problem: It contains undeclared egg whites.

What to do: If you suffer from an egg protein allergy or intolerance, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 770 015 for more information.

FOOD: Kraft Foods has recalled **Kraft Ravioli Bolognese**, in a 410 g can, best-before dates up to and including 09 Aug 2006.

The problem: It contains undeclared egg.

What to do: If you have an egg allergy or intolerance, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 034 241 for more information.

WINE: Beckett's Flat has recalled **Beckett's Flat Cabernet Merlot 2001**, in a 750 mL antique green bottle, sold in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA.

The problem: It may contain small glass fragments.

What to do: Don't drink it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (08) 9755 7402.

BIKES: Pacific Brands Sport & Leisure has recalled **Dunlop** and **Malvern Star bicycles**, sold in independent bicycle retailers and Big W stores from July 1, 2004. Affected models are Dunlop brand: Scorpion (50 cm), Glamour (50 cm), Mischief (40 cm), Daredevil (40 cm), Expedition (66 cm) and High Country (66 cm). Malvern Star brand: Cruncher (50 cm) and Cruncher DH (50 cm).

The problem: Affected bikes are missing a rubber stopper on the surface of the front suspension fork. This could cause the bicycle to collapse, injuring the rider.

What to do: Don't let anyone ride it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 104 885 for more information.

DISHWASHERS: Hagemeyer Brands Australia has recalled **Omega** and **Smeg dishwashers**, with a nine-digit serial number ending in 0, 1, 2, 3, 8 or 9, manufactured between November 1998 and May 2003. The serial number is on the inside edge of the dishwasher door on the right-hand side (after the letters SER).

The problem: These models are fitted with a component that could overheat, causing the dishwasher to fail and possible water, smoke and/or heat damage.

What to do: Stop using it. Record the model number and serial number and go to www.omegasmeg.com.au/recall or call 1800 180 347 for more information.

COOKTOPS: Electrolux Home Products has recalled **Westinghouse Virtuoso touch-control ceramic cooktops**, models PHL768U (serial numbers 343 40424 to 438 40450) and PHL798U (serial numbers 345 70006 to 433 70085), available since November 1, 2003. The cooktops are oblong or square ceramic glass, with a curved and bevelled front edge, touch controls and without any control knobs or trim. While the model and serial numbers are on a label on the underside of the cooktop, they're recognisable by the Virtuoso name and the above description.

The problem: There's a risk that the touch control panel may be faulty, resulting in cooking zones remaining on even when the control panel indicates they're switched off.

What to do: If you have one of these models, switch each cooking zone individually back to zero before switching the cooktop off at the on/off sensor panel. Call 1800 001 218 to organise a replacement control panel free of charge.

MOBILE PHONE BATTERIES: Kyocera Wireless Corp has recalled **batteries** for mobile phone models:

- **Kyocera Slider SE47** (product codes CV90-L305N-01, CV90-L305P-01, CV90-L305T-01 and CV90-L349T-01).
- **Kyocera KE414c** (Phantom) and **Kyocera 3245** (product codes CV90-K3040-03, CV90-K3040-09, CV90-K3040-10 and CV90-K3040-11).

Sold from February 2004 through mobile carriers within Australia.

The problem: The batteries were mislabelled and made with inappropriate parts and may short-circuit, overheat and pose a hazard.

What to do: Call 1800 501 101 to arrange for delivery of a free replacement battery.

CHAIR: Mitre 10 has recalled a **padded folding chair**, EAN 9416106610844 and 9416106610868, sold in Mitre 10, Mitre 10 Handy, Mitre 10 Solutions, Mitre 10 Home & Trade, Mitre 10 Mega and True Value Hardware stores. The EAN is the barcode number, which you can find on the chair's tag.

The problem: The chair buckles don't have teeth to prevent the straps, which keep the chair from folding flat, from slipping through. There's no weight warning on the packaging, no instructions on how to effectively thread the strap and buckle, and no warning to keep straps free of twists.

What to do: Stop using it immediately. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1300 306 100 for more information.

WALL CABINET SCREWS: Ikea has recalled the **screws** for its **Bertby** glass-door wall cabinet, article number 380.472.10, sold from 2002 until September 9, 2004, in Ikea in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA.

The problem: The screws — for fixing the wall attachment bracket to the top of the cabinet — may be of the wrong dimensions. This may result in the cabinet detaching from the wall.

What to do: Pick up replacement screws and repair instructions from an Ikea store, or call to have them posted. NSW: (02) 9313 6400 or (02) 8868 3900; Queensland: (07) 3340 2000; Victoria: (03) 8416 5000; WA (08) 9242 6467.

aboutchoice

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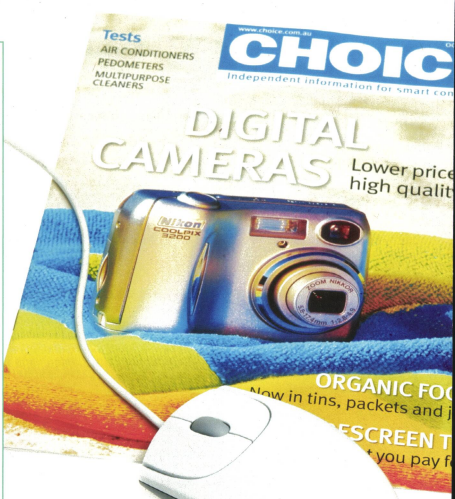

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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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hardword

Ingredients; Sugar,wheat glucose syrup 35%,soda bi-carbonate, gelatine,wheat flour

So where's the honey?

sparkling fruit tones with a hint of natural strawberries.
Natural strawberry tones follow from the nose to a soft, flavour-filled palate of bright, fruit characters. The finish is refreshingly crisp and dry.
"2 glasses to a bottle"
$20.00 per bottle
$5.50 per glass

We'd recommend you buy by the glass ...

THOMAS TRUNDLE UNDER THE BED UNIT Learning Curve Thomas the Tank Set. Comes with everything pictured

A Thomas trundle, a bed *and* a kid for under $400? Bargain!

Weekend Banquet Breakfast $17.50
10% surcharge on weekends

WHY NOT JUST SAY $19.25 IN THE FIRST PLACE?

If the 10% surcharge applies only on weekends, we have to wonder if the 'Weekend banquet breakfast' is available other than on weekends .

If you buy this Surgeguard powerboard thinking it will protect you against lightning-induced power surges — as suggested by the pack's impressive illustration — you'll be disappointed. According to the back of the pack, lightning strikes are over-voltages, not surges, and can't be absorbed by Surgeguard.

LIGHTNING STRIKES
Direct lightning strikes are not surges. They are in fact, devastating & powerful over-voltages that can not be absorbed by SURGEGUARD. If you require lightning protection consult your electrician first for professional advice.

FREE TRAVEL
for over 60s
Friday 1st October
Thanks to the Government of South Australia.
Discover how easy the Adelaide Metro public transport system is, celebrate International Day of the Older Person and TRAVEL FREE!
32 — The City Messenger, October 7, 2009

Check out this great free (for the government) travel offer!

This ad for free travel for over 60s would have been more effective if it had appeared *before* the actual day. But it probably saved the government some money.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for best entry goes to V Ward. Thanks also to R Thompson, M Vandine, V Chessell and C Hainsworth for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.